

SECRET SERVICE

OLD AND YOUNG KING BRADY, DETECTIVES.

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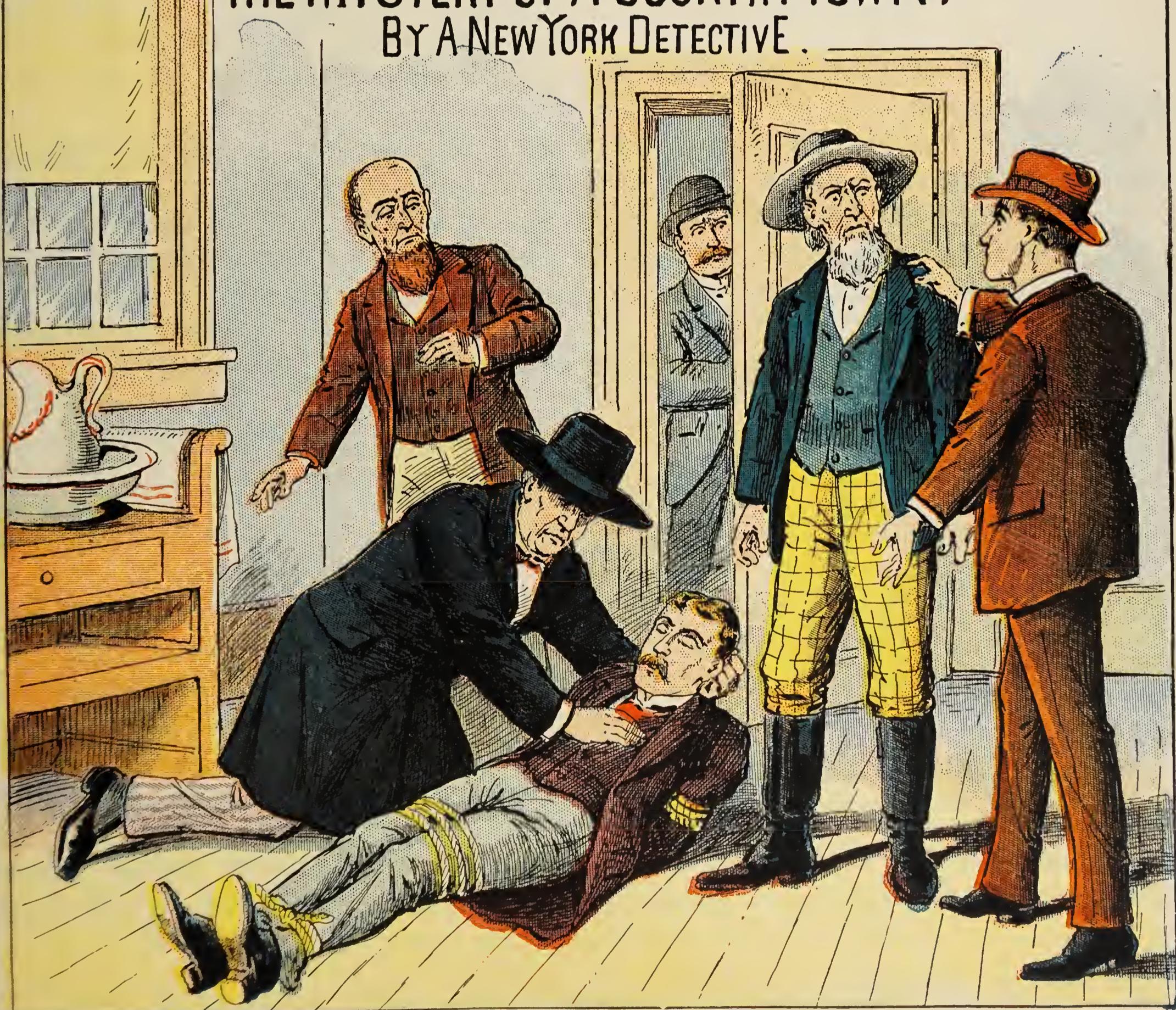
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THE BRADYS DOWN EAST

OR

THE MYSTERY OF A COUNTRY TOWN.

BY A NEW YORK DETECTIVE.



Old King Brady knelt and felt the victim's heart. Young King Brady placed a hand on Johnson's shoulder. "You know something about this," he said.

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THE BRADYS DOWN EAST;

OR,

The Mystery of a Country Town.

An Interesting Detective Story.

BY A NEW YORK DETECTIVE.

CHAPTER I.

A STRANGE MYSTERY.

"Well, Harry," said Old King Brady to his young protege and partner, "I have a case now which bids fair to promise us some hot work. The details will amuse and interest you."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Young King Brady with interest. "Tell me what it is. I am curious."

"Our last case was located in the slums of a great city."

"Yes."

"Well, this case will take us into the rural districts of Maine."

"Down East?"

"Yes."

"Whew!" exclaimed Harry, in genuine surprise. "That is a transition. What has happened down in Podunk, now?"

"A very mysterious affair. The whole country is up in arms. The chief of the Secret Service was communicated with by the Selectmen of Greenbush. The chief very wisely and thoughtfully turned the case over to me."

Old King Brady spoke facetiously.

"Which showed his good taste," agreed Harry. "But what is the case?"

"Here is the letter verbatim of the Chairman of Selectmen. Read it."

Harry took the letter, which was written in a sprawling hand upon a full page of foolscap.

Thus it read:

"To the Chief of Detectives,

"Secret Service, New York City.

"Dear Sir: By a vote of this town of Greenbush, Maine, it has been decided to communicate with you in regard to some very mysterious happenings in this place, within the past month. Our constable is unable to handle the case, and so are all the detectives in this part of the country. The people here are very much stirred up over it.

"About a month ago, near the old grist mill on the Bangor Road, there was found a pool of blood and signs of a struggle. This has suggested the possibility of a crime, which events since have seemed to verify. The night before this discovery was made, people on the main street were aroused from their slumbers by the sounds of a team driven at full speed through the town, while ear-piercing shrieks filled the air.

"The voice seemed to be that of a woman in dire distress. The next week a human hand severed at the wrist was found tied to the door of a prominent citizen of the town. Beneath it was a placard written in blood, saying:

"This is one of many.
There are more to follow."

"The hand was that of a woman of the better class. On one finger was a plain gold ring. An inscription within the ring may furnish a clew.

"Why the hand should be tied to the door of Honorable Silas McClure's house is the deep mystery, and the people of this town want it solved. It looks as if a murderer was at large hereabouts.

"The town has voted an appropriation of one thousand

dollars for the solution of the mystery. Please send us your best detective at once.

"(Signed.)

ARTEMAS BLAKE,

"Chairman Board of Selectmen."

"There you are!" said Old King Brady. "Now, what is your opinion?"

Harry whistled softly.

"Very interesting," he said. "I don't wonder the town is all stirred up."

"Nor I. I believe it is a lively case for us."

"Well, that is good."

"I told the chief we would give it a try."

"Good! I am ready."

"Then we will start at once."

When the Bradys moved it was with dispatch. Detectives always hold themselves in readiness for an instant change of base.

In their travels they carried very little baggage.

A few disguises were concealed about their persons, with wigs and cosmetics. Revolvers and pocket-lanterns were also in the itinerary.

Then they were ready for anything at any time. Quietly the two Bradys slipped out of New York.

For years Old King Brady had been known as New York's premier detective.

His reputation was world wide.

He had hunted the evildoer so persistently and successfully that his name carried terror into the ranks of the crooks. For years he had worked alone.

But one day he came across a rising and ambitious young detective of the same name, though no blood relation. Harry Brady made friends with the old detective.

It may be that Old King Brady realized that he was getting old and might need a successor.

In any event he grew deeply interested in the young detective. The two fraternized to mutual advantage.

They worked together very successfully.

Harry was given many valuable points by the older detective, and soon he became a master in the profession.

As he was so much in the older detective's company, he became known as Young King Brady.

Greenbush was certainly all stirred up over the strange mystery which no one was able to solve.

All sorts of theories were advanced, all manner of explanations were discussed.

But all in vain.

Who was the murderer, and who the victim? They certainly could not be placed in Greenbush.

No resident of the town was missing. No one was under suspicion.

It would seem that the participants in the affair were certainly outsiders. But from whence came they, and where had they gone?

A search was made for the rest of the victim's body. Every nook and corner of the town was explored.

Thus matters were, when one day two strangers arrived and were given rooms at the Greenbush Hotel.

This was a country tavern of the familiar class, with its

complement of bar-room loungers and the occasional summer boarder.

The Bradys very quietly went to their room. Jefferson Clark, the proprietor, scratched his bald head and remarked:

"I reckon they'll be more than transient. They have the 'pearance of stayers."

"What dew ye make 'em out to be?" inquired Alden Jenks, one of the loungers.

"Hey?" exclaimed the host. "Wall, if I was tew go by my own opinyun, I should say they was a couple of New York drummers."

"What be they sellin' of?"

"Yew'll hev to ax 'em thet question yeself, Alden," said the hotel proprietor testily. "That's all I can say."

After a due period the two detectives appeared below stairs.

They sauntered out upon the porch of the little tavern and lit cigars, completely ignoring the loungers, to all appearance.

But despite the seeming, every man in the throng was seen and scrutinized by the Bradys. Not the slightest detail escaped them.

"Well," said Harry, as they settled down into comfortable chairs and perched their feet on the railing. "We are literally way down East, aren't we?"

"That we are, my boy," agreed the old detective. "It's no dream."

"I can say that it's like dropping from one planet into another."

Old King Brady laughed.

"Yet much of the brain and brawn of the city to-day has come from this backwoods district," he declared. "One need not be ashamed of rural birth."

"They have at least furnished us with a fiendish crime, than which the city slums could have no worse."

"Quite correct! Hello! What is this?"

Up to the hotel door drove a span of horses, hitched to a light wagon, which held two occupants.

One was a man of fine appearance, and well dressed. The other was plainly his coachman.

There was a look of haggard anxiety and grief upon the man's face. He alighted and met Clark, the publican, at the tavern door.

"Welcome to Greenbush Hotel, sir!" said the hotel keeper. "Here, Jerry, take care of ther gentleman's hosses. Won't ye come in and register?"

"I will, sir," replied the newcomer. "Then I would like to know where Selectman Blake can be found?"

"Yes, sir, suttinly. He's most likely at his house, jest now. I'll send a messenger over, if ye'd like."

"I wish you would."

Very obsequiously and inwardly consumed with curiosity, the landlord led the way to the desk.

He pushed forward the register, and the newcomer wrote his name. The loungers stood about gaping with wonderment.

Upon the page of the book the newcomer wrote, with flowing hand:

"Rafael Black, Portland."

"Gee!" whispered one of the bystanders. "That's Black,

the millionaire. What is he doin' of down here? He has come to see the selectman."

"Pshaw!" said another. "Likely he wants an abatement of taxes."

"Naw," interjected Alden Jenks, with a mysterious shrug. "I'll wager he is interested in the mystery."

"Ther mystery?"

Every lounger crowded nearer to hear Black's conversation with the wily tavern-keeper, who was doing his smoothest to elicit the object of his visit.

"No, I don't own any property around here, nor I don't want to," said the newcomer impatiently. "I want to get track of my lost daughter. I'll give one hundred thousand dollars for her safe return to her home."

Like an electric shock this admission ran through the crowd. The Bradys turned in their chairs. They were now interested.

"Sho! Ye don't say!" said the shrewd tavern-keeper. "I hadn't heerd anythin' about it. Is she lost?"

"Lost!" said Black in tones of plain agony. "I only wish I knew. I can only say that she has disappeared, and I can get no trace of her."

The loungers were subjects for a picture, so intense was their attitude of interest.

"Mebbe," began Clark, "mebbe—that is—per'aps ye think likely she may be connected with the mystery we've had in this town fer a leetle time past?"

CHAPTER II.

MR. BLODGET IS BARRED OUT.

Breathlessly the loungers waited for the reply to this question.

"Yes, yes!" nodded the newcomer. "But God spare me any further pain. I can only pray that—it is not the same."

"Amen, sir," said Clark respectfully. "Will ye go to your room now, sir?"

"Not at present, thank you. I will wait on the piazza for the selectman."

With this the new arrival strolled out upon the piazza. It is hardly necessary to say that the loungers followed. But Black did not heed them.

The two Bradys, it is needless to say, were interested.

However, they made no overture or attempt to question Black. They were satisfied to await the course of events.

And developments were not long in coming.

The loungers had been holding a hushed discussion in the corner of the piazza.

Now one of them, a tall, cadaverous fellow, with shrewd features, cunning grey eyes and long chin whiskers, made his way up to Black's side.

"Axin' your pardon, sir," he said clumsily, "but my name is Cyrus Blodget, an' I'm of the belief that mebbe I kin do you a good turn."

Black turned eagerly, and with a searching gaze scrutinized the speaker.

"Are you in earnest?" he asked sharply. "This is no matter of jest to me."

"Wall, you kin bet your life I'm in earnest," declared Blodget firmly. "I'm no joker."

"In that case I'll talk with you. What have you to say?"

"I heard you say you was lookin' fer your lost darter."

"That is true."

"Wall, now, you say you'll give one hundred thousand dollars fer her return safe an' sound?"

The countryman's keen eyes were fixed penetratingly upon the millionaire. Black sprang up and faced the speaker.

"Do you know where she is?" he asked tensely.

For a moment Blodget seemed to be disconcerted.

"I ain't makin' no promises," he said. "But will ye pay me that hundred thousand if I find your lost gal?"

"Yes," replied Black.

The countryman shifted his quid of tobacco and nodded in a thoughtful sort of manner.

Then he inquired:

"When did she disappear?"

"About a month ago."

"Yew think she was abducted?"

"I do."

"Per'aps she committed suicide. Lots of people disappear that way."

"Never!" cried Black positively. "That is not possible. She was stolen from her home by an unprincipled gang of ruffians."

"Wall," said Blodget finally, "I'll talk with yew later. Hyar comes the selectman now."

"One moment!"

Black trembled with eagerness.

"Wall?"

"Do you know anything of her? Have you a clew?"

"I ain't ready to say yet," replied Blodget. "Time will tell. I'll tell yew more bye and bye."

And the countryman shuffled away.

The Bradys had listened to all this with surprise and mingled emotions.

Could Blodget really know anything about the missing girl? Or was it a cheeky subterfuge on his part to get news?

The detectives were inclined to the latter theory. At this moment Selectman Blake appeared on the scene.

A long conversation ensued between Blake and the millionaire. It was listened to with interest by the bystanders.

"My soul!" groaned Mr. Black, after listening to the selectman's full account of the mystery. "I fear the worst. There is no doubt but that my daughter Janice is lost to me forever. She has been cruelly murdered!"

"Who could the murderer be?" asked Selectman Blake.

"I cannot even guess."

"Had she a foe?"

"None to my knowledge."

"Perhaps some enemy of yours has done this thing to spite you?"

"It is possible," agreed Black. "But I can think of no enemy who would be likely to do such a thing."

"It is very strange. But could you identify your daughter's hand by means of the ring found on the severed hand, if it should prove to be hers?"

"A ring?" cried Black. "What sort of a ring was it?"

"A plain band of gold, with letters on the inside. I think the inscription was, 'Mother to J. B.'"

Black gave a choking cry and reeled back.

"Oh, my soul, the worst is known!" he groaned. "Janice wore just such a ring, which was given her by her mother."

Selectman Blake looked serious.

"Really, Mr. Black," he said, "this is a startling coincidence. The severed hand is yet at the coroner's with the ring. Shall we go down there and complete the identification?"

Black covered his face with his hands for a moment and was silent. His form shook with grief.

"Yes," he said finally. "I give her up. My Janice is lost. But before heaven I register a vow that I will wreak vengeance upon her slayer, whoever he may be."

With this he descended the steps with Blake.

Through all this the Bradys had listened with the deepest of interest. Old King Brady whispered to Harry:

"It is time for us to act."

"Yes."

The two detectives arose and followed Blake and Black down the steps. Old King Brady stepped alongside the selectman.

"I beg pardon," he said in an undertone, "but we are here in answer to your telegram."

The selectman stared at Old King Brady.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"Is it possible you have forgotten the request you made the Chief of the Secret Service in New York?"

In an instant Blake's manner underwent a change.

"The deuce!" he ejaculated. "You are——"

"Sh!" interrupted Old King Brady. "It is very essential just now that our identity shall not be known."

"You are detectives?"

"Yes."

"Your names?"

"James and Harry Brady."

"What? You are not the Two Bradys?"

"We are called that."

The selectman's face showed the keenest of delight. He shook hands with both, and then in an undertone introduced them to Black.

"You have come just in the nick of time. I believe developments are at hand which will clear up this mystery."

"I am glad of that."

"There is no doubt but that murder has been done. Mr. Black, who is from Portland, reports the mysterious disappearance of his daughter. She wore a ring similar to the one found on a finger of the severed hand. Do you see?"

Old King Brady nodded.

The detectives saw that Selectman Blake was a man of more than ordinary intelligence.

"It looks like a valuable clew," said the old detective.

"You will permit us to be present at the identification?"

"Certainly."

With this all four started away down the street.

But they had not proceeded far when footsteps were heard behind them.

Blake turned his head.

He gave a start.

The tavern lounger, Cyrus Blodget, was close behind them. The selectmen halted and asked:

"Where are you going, Blodget?"

"Down to ther coroner's with yew," replied the countryman.

"No, you're not," said Blake sharply. "This is a private affair. You must restrain your curiosity until the proper time."

"I reckon it's to your advantage fer me to go," demurred Blodget.

"What do you mean?"

"Jest what I say."

"Do you know anything about the mystery?"

"Mebbe I do, an' mebbe I don't. That gent has offered me a hundred thousand to find his darter."

"Do you know where she is?"

"If I do it's my bizness," retorted Blodget.

"It's my business, too," said Blake severely. "If you know anything of value now is your time to tell it. It won't lessen your chances for the reward."

"Wall, I ain't ready to tell what I know," declared Blodget.

"Just what I thought," declared the selectman. "You know nothing whatever. It's only a game to get possession of the news. Go back to your pals in the tavern bar-room, and console yourself with the fact that you know all you're going to know for a while."

Blodget scowled savagely.

"Then yew won't let me in?" he asked.

"Not this time."

The fellow dropped an oath and turned away. The Bradys exchanged glances, but said nothing.

In due time they reached the coroner's. All were ushered into the little shop, which was half filled with unfinished coffins.

"Yes," said the coroner. "I've got the hand all right. I put it in alcohol to preserve it."

He brought out a glass jar. The severed hand was viewed by Mr. Black.

"It is a lady's hand," he said, "but I cannot identify it positively. Let me see the ring."

The ring was produced.

Mr. Black choked and gasped and said thickly:

"Yes, yes! It is hers. My Janice is dead!"

For a few moments the agonized father gave way to uncontrollable grief.

But after a time he grew calmer.

He turned to the Bradys.

"You are detectives?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Old King Brady.

"Good! You shall be well rewarded if you will track down the perpetrator of this dark deed."

"We will surely do so," declared the old detective.

With this all returned to the hotel.

Mr. Black decided to make his home at the hostelry for

a while. His whole being was bent upon the avenging of his daughter's wrongs and death.

The Bradys, on their return to the hotel, went at once to their room.

They sat down before a cosy fire and Old King Brady drew out his note-book.

CHAPTER III.

A STRANGE ASSAULT.

Deduction was a favorite method of the Bradys.

By a skillful use of it they had been enabled to solve many a difficult case.

"Well," said Old King Brady, "we've made a start, Harry."

"Indeed we have!"

"I think we will have the whole case in hand before the week is out."

"I hope so."

"Now, to summarize. This old gentleman, Black, is wealthy, and has a very beautiful daughter."

"Exactly."

"No doubt there is an unsuccessful suitor in the case."

"Just so!"

"The unsuccessful suitor plans to abduct the daughter. She is decoyed away from home."

"Very natural."

"But attempts to coerce her into marriage were futile. Driving through this town after dark, she frees herself from the gag and screams. Ergo, the thrilling cries described by people aroused from their dreams are explained."

"Very logical."

"A step further," continued Old King Brady, "and we have the abductor and his victim going by the old mill. She struggles to free herself, perhaps leaps out of the carriage, and in an insane rage he drives a knife into her bosom."

"The murder is done."

"Exactly, and the pool of blood is explained. Now the murderer places the body in the carriage and has concealed or destroyed it."

For fully five minutes the detectives mused and reflected.

Then Harry said:

"All very logical, but yet, some things are not explained."

"What?"

"The severed hand, which was tied to the door of a man who had not the remotest connection with the affair."

"Yes, there is one hitch. But that may have been only a curious freak of the murderer's mind."

"Perhaps he thought by so doing he would mislead any investigation."

"But he need not have done anything. The finding of the pool of blood would have been the only discoverable evidence of a crime."

"That is true."

"It is still a mystery."

"A very desperate mystery."

The detectives smoked and studied.

In some respects the case looked simple. In others the whys and wherefores were many and inexplicable.

Just as they were going to bed Old King Brady said:

"I have a theory!"

"Well?"

"We may be doing wrong in overlooking that fellow who was anxious to accompany us to the coroner's!"

"Cyrus Blodget?"

"Yes."

Harry was thoughtful.

"It is not improbable that he may know much," he said.

"Let us overhaul him to-morrow."

"We will do so."

"My opinion is that if he is connected with the case, he will be a spy or traitor. I would not trust him."

"Just my idea. But how he bit at the reward offered by Mr. Black."

"Aye, that he did!"

The next morning at an early hour the detectives were astir.

They went down to breakfast.

When they came out they walked into the hotel office.

All the loungers were about the place, as usual, and each seemed to wear a triumphant and comprehensive smile.

The Bradys walked up to the desk.

The genial proprietor, all suavity and smiles, was there.

"Ah, gentlemen," he said, "I hope you slept well."

"Very nicely, thank you," replied Harry.

"Ah, very glad, I assure you," declared the Boniface. "It is not often we have the honor of entertaining gentlemen of your profession."

"Eh?" exclaimed Old King Brady, with affected carelessness. "Do you not put up a good many drummers?"

"Drummers!" ejaculated Clark. "Haw, haw, haw! What do yew think of that, boys?"

At this all the loungers in the place haw-hawed. Harry winked at Old King Brady.

"They're onto us!" he whispered.

The tavern-keeper leaned over the bar and whispered:

"In course it's all right, but I knowed the fust moment yew set foot in this hotel that yew was detectives. I didn't say nuthin', but somehow all the rest of 'em got onto it, and there you are!"

"Yes," admitted Old King Brady dryly. "Here we are. I wonder, with the remarkable faculty for penetration that you people have, that you haven't solved the town mystery yet."

"Per'aps some on us have," said the tavern-keeper significantly.

"Then," said Old King Brady sternly, "it is your duty to subserve the ends of the law."

The hotel-keeper wineed and bowed eagerly and with servility.

"Ah, I ain't claimin' ter know much myself," he said. "But ther's old Blodget as 'thinks he has an insight."

Old King Brady turned.

"Mr. Blodget," he said sharply.

"Eh, what's that?" said the countryman, looking up hastily.

"What do you know about this mystery of the severed hand?"

Blodget smiled in a cunning way.

"I'm goin' ter tell that at the right time," he declared.

"It's your duty to tell it now."

"Humph! Do yew think I'm a fool?" simpered the fellow. "When that's a hundred thousand at stake a man will work on ther safe side."

"You'll be as sure of your money by telling all now."

"Yas, but that ain't perducing the gal, safe an' well."

Old King Brady gave a start.

"Do you know that she is alive?" he asked with lightning quickness.

So sudden and pointed was the question that the countryman was almost taken off his guard.

"I—that is—I—I ain't saying," he stammered confusedly. "Yew'll know that sometime."

Old King Brady walked straight up to Blodget.

"I believe you're an unconscionable old scoundrel," he declared. "I've a mind to jail you on suspicion."

"That's all the good it would do," said Blodget sullenly.

"Won't you tell what you know?"

"No."

"Do you know anything?"

"That's my bizness!"

Old King Brady saw it was useless to push the matter further. But from that moment Blodget was under surveillance.

It was now long after nine o'clock. Mr. Black had not come downstairs. Suddenly a stifled cry was heard from the stairway, and a man appeared on the stairs.

It was Black's driver and man.

His face was white as chalk, and he trembled like an aspen.

"Gentlemen!" he cried earnestly, "will ye give me a hand to open the door to my master's room. I have a belief that something has befallen him."

This startling declaration brought all in the bar-room to their feet.

All except Blodget showed surprise and alarm.

"What is that?" cried Old King Brady. "Do you know where your master's room is?"

"That I do, sir."

"Have you called him?"

"Sure, a dozen times, sir, but he will not answer. I am sure something has happened him, sir."

"Enough!" cried the old detective. "Come, gentlemen, we will investigate."

Up the stairs the detectives went, while the throng followed.

Blodget was now foremost.

The door of Mr. Black's room was securely locked. It resisted all efforts at opening.

"Burst it in!" cried the landlord excitedly. "Perhaps he's dead!"

Even as he spoke a low, muffled groan came from beyond the oaken door. This settled all doubt in Old King Brady's mind.

"Here goes!" he shouted. He placed his shoulder to the door.

There was a muffled creaking and crashing, and the door yielded. It burst inward.

As the old detective half stumbled into the room he gave a mighty start. The sight which he beheld fairly thrilled him.

On the floor of the room lay a prostrate form. Ropes bound it hands and feet. The form was that of Rafael Black, the millionaire.

While Old King Brady stood for an instant overcome with horror, a strange incident occurred in the corridor.

The millionaire's coachman, whose name was James Kelley, had been moaning and groaning all the while that Old King Brady had been forcing the door.

Suddenly he cried:

"I knew the black-hearted spalpeens would kill him!"

"What do you mean?" asked Harry, gripping his arm.

The fellow hesitated a moment, and then blurted out:

"You'll find him dead. I know that fellow there," he pointed at the countryman Blodget. "I know him well. His name is Johnson, and he's a crook. He's Joe Johnson, I tell you, and he went into this room last night with Clifton Moore. They've killed Mr. Black, I know they have!"

Harry turned quickly and faced Blodget.

The countryman looked blank.

"The feller is crazy," he said. "I warn't in the hotel at all last night!"

"Is your name Johnson?" asked Harry quietly.

"No, it's Cyrus Blodget, an' everybody in this taoun knows me," protested Blodget indignantly. "I don't know nuthin' about this feller that says my name is Johnson. He's a liar!"

"You're another!" yelled the valet furiously. "And I can prove it. You have killed Mr. Black."

The impulse was upon Harry to effect the countryman's arrest right there.

But Blodget pushed past him into the room, with the hotel-keeper.

Kelley, the valet, remained outside very much excited, with the crowd which had come up from the office.

As soon as Old King Brady could recover from his surprise he exclaimed:

"It is Mr. Black. There is dark work here."

"Wall, I should say so!" cried Johnson, or Blodget, as he stood gazing in apparent wonderment and horror at the unconscious man on the floor. "I reckon it's another bit of mystery."

"It looks like it," agreed the old detective.

"Mercy on us!" gasped the tavern-keeper. "Is he alive?"

Old King Brady knelt and felt the victim's heart. Young King Brady placed a hand on Johnson's shoulder.

"You know something about this," he said.

Johnson turned with surprise, which if not genuine was well assumed.

"You are mistaken, friend," he said positively. "I know nuthin' about it."

"But why should that valet accuse yon?"

"He's drunk or crazy!" declared Blodget. "My name ain't Johnson, nor I warn't in this room last night."

At this moment Kelley, the valet, staggered into the room. "I can prove it," he cried. "Don't let him go." "You are under arrest," declared Young King Brady.

CHAPTER IV.

SOME CURIOUS CONCLUSIONS.

Meanwhile Old King Brady had made the discovery that Mr. Black's heart was still beating.

He was covered with blood and dust, and there were fearful contusions on his head.

It was evident that he had been beaten into insensibility and then bound and gagged and left to die, or perhaps left for dead.

The old detective quickly cut the bonds.

Then the injured man was put to bed, and restoratives were applied.

All this while Blodget was under close arrest.

Young King Brady had handcuffed himself to him. There was no escape.

"As soon as Mr. Black comes to his senses we shall know the truth," declared Old King Brady. "He certainly can tell who his assailants were."

"That'll clear me!" declared Blodget. "My name ain't Johnson, nor I didn't do this job."

Hours passed, and yet the injured man did not fully regain his senses.

His injuries were severe.

"But who is Clifton Moore?" asked Harry of the valet, Kelley.

"He's a young fellow who lived in Portland, and was in love with the girl," declared Kelley. "He and Johnson both went into this room last night. I saw 'em go in and they didn't come out while I was up. I went to bed after midnight. You can be sure they did this job."

"Are you positive as to the identity of Mr. Blodget as Johnson?"

"In course I am. He knows me well."

"You're a liar!" cried Blodget. "I never saw you in my life till you came to this hotel."

"Oh, that bluff won't work!" cried Kelley. "The game is up. You and Moore killed Miss Janice, and you know it. And you tried to kill Mr. Black last night."

"Did you see any one enter the hotel last night answering the description of Mr. Blodget and this Moore?" asked Harry of the tavern-keeper.

"No, sir," replied that worthy. "I didn't see a soul come in or go out after midnight."

Far from throwing light upon the affair, all these revelations only seemed to intensify the mystery.

But all now waited anxiously for the resuscitation of Mr. Black, who alone could solve the problem.

Blodget strenuously protested his innocence.

"Why, gosh dang it," he argued, "do ye s'pose if I was

guilty I'd hev come right intew this ere room and have let yew arrest me?"

This certainly was in the countryman's favor, as Harry was bound to admit.

Very slowly Mr. Black recovered.

But finally he was able to realize where he was and what had happened.

He was very weak.

But Old King Brady gently questioned him.

His reply was astonishing:

"I saw nobody!" he said. "I entered my room in the darkness, and was stricken down by some unknown and unseen foe. That is all I know."

This most astonishing declaration seemed to turn the tables.

It was a direct refutation of the valet's story.

"Did anybody named Clifton Moore or Joe Johnson call on you during the evening?" asked Old King Brady.

"I do not know anybody named Johnson," replied Mr. Black. "Clifton Moore is my daughter's school friend, and a very estimable young man, who is at present in Portland. I had no callers last evening."

"Your valet, Kelley, declared that you did."

Mr. Black was astonished.

"I have suspected that fellow," he declared. "I believe he is a rascal. Where is he?"

With this all turned to look for the valet.

An astounding discovery resulted.

He had disappeared.

Not a trace of him could be found anywhere. In the confusion he had vanished.

Again the mystery was intensified.

The detectives asked themselves many curious and thrilling questions.

Why had Kelley accused Blodget and Clifton Moore, two people apparently innocent of any connection with the affair?

Perhaps the wily valet had believed that his master would never recover consciousness. There was a possibility that he was the real assailant.

In that case, who was he, and what was his connection with the abduction and possible murder of Janice Black? For that he was thus connected it was logical to henceforth believe.

The town and the country about was scoured for Kelley. But he could not be found.

Meanwhile Blodget was exonerated and released, for he easily proved an alibi.

All suspicions which the detectives had entertained against him were thus forever banished.

They ceased to look upon Blodget as a factor in the case, beyond what theories he might elucidate.

For days the Bradys worked hard to throw light on the mystery.

Mr. Black rapidly recovered, and was soon himself once more.

Step by step and thread by thread the Bradys took up the case.

First they found the stable in Bangor where the team was

hired which had brought the abductor and his victim to Greenbush.

This was obtained through the action of the stable-keeper, who advertised for the recovery of his missing outfit.

Armed with a description of the horse and carriage, the two detectives now scoured the country about.

And finally they found the outfit in the possession of a logging Frenchman, who lived in a rude hut near the banks of the Penobscot River.

His story was straightforward.

A stranger had met him on the highway and sold him the horse and carriage for the ridiculous sum of forty dollars.

The unsuspecting wood-chopper took the bargain home with him, never dreaming that he would have to give it up, or that it was stolen property.

The Bradys returned the property to its rightful owner.

They got a description of the thief. As described by the Frenchman, he was tall, with a smooth face and flashily dressed.

But there all clew ceased.

The wood-chopper had no further information to give.

He declared that the thief had vanished into the forest after the sale, and that was the last seen of him.

The Bradys were deeply puzzled.

Who was this unknown horse thief?

Was he the real abductor of Janice Black? If so, who was he? The mystery was deeper than ever.

The two detectives returned to Greenbush, and again went over the features of the case.

Once more deduction was employed.

In a previous case it had not worked with any degree of success. But the detectives felt more sure this time.

"Well," began Harry, "let us start from the time of the assault upon Mr. Black."

"Very good!"

"We will assume that the affair was connected with the abduction. It may not have been."

"Undoubtedly it was!"

"Well, we will assume that. Define a motive for the assault."

"No doubt it was intended to murder Mr. Black."

"Yes."

"Somebody wanted him put out of the way for a certain purpose. That purpose was the motive. Now, what motive could be possible?"

"Revenge for a fancied wrong."

"Yes."

"Or possibly the purpose of forcing the girl into an unwilling marriage."

"Thirdly—"

"For the purpose of demanding a heavy ransom."

Old King Brady gave a great start.

"Ransom!" he ejaculated. "Does that recall a certain thing to you?"

"What?"

"The eagerness of Blodget when Black offered the reward of one hundred thousand—his apparent confidence in his ability to find the girl?"

The detectives looked at each other.

Here was a straw.

They were willing to clutch at even the slenderest thread. Both recalled Blodget's peculiar manner.

"By Jove!" said Harry impressively. "We are not half into this case yet!"

"I believe you!"

"I shall soon be suspecting everybody. On my word, maybe that countryman does know something?"

"It is his claim."

"Either he is a fool or a rascal!"

"Assuming that the purpose of the abduction was to gain a ransom, I would wager that Blodget is in the game."

"Let us shadow him."

"All right."

"He does not fancy that we suspect him?"

"Not in the least."

"That is in our favor. Well, Harry, we have a new theory. May it bear fruit this time."

"I hope so."

With this the detectives left their room and sauntered out into the hotel office.

CHAPTER V.

THE BOGUS DOCTOR.

When Old and Young King Brady appeared in the office they saw that the hotel boasted a new arrival.

He sat in a chair by the piazza railing and was in conversation with Cyrus Blodget.

His remarkable appearance at once attracted the attention of the Bradys, as well as won their interest.

They exchanged glances.

"What do you think?" whispered Harry.

"It is material."

"I believe you."

The newcomer was tall and of sinewy frame. His features were dark and almost fierce in their expression.

He was dressed in peculiar fashion.

He wore broad check trousers, a brown coat, a fancy vest, open shirt front and high stock collar.

His shoes were of patent leather and his hat of wide brim and soft felt.

A huge diamond glittered on his shirt front. Altogether he was seemingly a good specimen of a Bowery sport.

The detectives lounged about for a time.

Then Old King Brady leaned over the desk and spoke to Proprietor Jefferson Clark in a low tone.

"Who is the gentleman with Cyrus Blodget?" he asked, carelessly.

"Oh, bless yer soul!" exclaimed the Boniface. "that's Dr. Gray. We allus call him Gus. They do say he has made a heap of money down New York way. He sartinly looks prosperous."

"Then he is a native of this place?" asked Old King Brady.

"Bless ye, no! He's from nobody knows where. But he comes here every summer and sports around awhile. I've

heard it said he knows more about poker than he does about sick people."

"Yes," said the old detective, slowly. "Has he been here long?"

"Hain't been here before this summer. He was here all last summer. Would ye like an introduction?"

"Perhaps so, by-and-by," said the old detective, as he walked away.

The two Bradys loitered around the hotel office a while. Presently Blodget chanced to see them.

At once he made a gesture.

"Hi! come here, Mister Brady," he cried. "Here's a man likely can tell ye somethin' about the mystery."

Old King Brady sauntered up.

"Ah!" he said quietly, "that is just the sort of a man I am looking for."

"Well," said Gray, in a diffident way, "I don't know as I have very much I can shell out. You see, I'm not sure of what I put my peepers on."

The coarse slang used by the fellow jarred on Old King Brady's nerves.

But a detective cannot afford to be over-nice. So he stifled his disgust and said:

"Be it ever so small a elew, it will be gratefully received."

"Y-es, of course," stammered Gray, with what Old King Brady regarded as affectation.

"What light can you throw on the affair, Mr.——"

"Gray," rejoined Blodget. "Gustavus Gray, Mister Brady. Gus and I air old friends."

"Well, you see, Mr. Brady," said Gray, effusively, "I have been selling my Rheumatism Killer up through this country for a few weeks past. Let me see, it was the night of the thirteenth, wasn't it, that the queer things happened in this town?"

"I believe so."

"Yes; well, it was that very night I was going down to Orono and missed the train. That didn't queer me, for I'm pretty lively on my walking gear, so I set out to walk. Well, you see, I left this town off to the north."

"In course ye would, going that way," asserted Blodget.

"That's it, Cy. Well, I didn't get along to the Orono turnpike until about three o'clock. Then a team went by me like a streak of electricity.

"It was a horse and democrat wagon. In the wagon there was something covered up with a blanket. I didn't think anything of it at the time more than to feel mad at the chap for not offering me a ride."

"In course!" said Cy.

"Well, the team went out of sight around a bend in the road. I trudged on a mile or two until I came to a bridge which went over a little brook. I could see a pond through the trees and a narrow road led down to it.

"As I was crossing the bridge I heard a horse whinny, and looking down through the trees in the moonlight, I saw the very team that passed me.

"It was backed up to the water, and I saw something dumped out of the hind end into the water with a splash. At the time it looked to me as if somebody was carting away some refuse to dump, and I recollect thinking it queer that they should be doing it after dark.

"But nothing more than that. I waited on the bridge until the team came up to the road. Then I shouted to the driver.

"He pulled up and looked around.

"Is this the right road to Orono?" I asked.

"It is," he replied.

"Can you give me a lift on the way?" I asked again.

"Can't, for I'm going the other way," he said, and then he drove off."

There was a moment of silence.

The Bradys had listened to this surprising narrative with the deepest of interest.

Cyrus Blodget seemed to be much excited.

"What do ye think of that?" he cried. "Same kind of a team, on ther same night. Like enough the murderer dumped his victim into that pond."

"Wall, it does look queer," declared the hotelkeeper.

"I declare, it never occurred to me before that there could be any connection," said Gus Gray, earnestly. "But when Cy told me the story of that affair it put me to thinking."

Old King Brady leaned forward.

"Are you absolutely certain that your vision did not fail you?" he asked.

"Sure!" replied Gray.

"Do you think you could take us to the very spot?"

"I do."

"And will you do it?"

"Why, of course!"

Old King Brady turned to Clark.

"Bring a team from your stable," he said. "How far is it to that point?"

"Oh, maybe a dozen miles."

"Very well. Let men with grappling hooks and lines accompany us. Some one should see the coroner and the selectmen at once."

This declaration of the detective's created a tremendous sensation. At once preparations were made for an investigation of this new elew.

Mr. Blaek now appeared on the scene, and was deeply thrilled. His face grew pale and his voice husky.

Selectman Blake and the coroner responded promptly.

They were to drive down to White Lake, as it was called, in their own team. Others proposed to do the same.

But Mr. Blaek and the Bradys, with Blodget and Gray, all went in one carriage behind a lively pair of horses.

The twelve miles was quickly covered. The locality was quite as Gray had described it.

There was the little brook which the highway crossed.

The pond was just below and could be seen from the road. The little road led down to it.

At this point the shores of the land shelved downward into a dozen feet of water.

Anything dumped from the shore would sink to at least this depth. The water was very transparent.

Thus far Gray's story was fully corroborated. It remained to be seen what had been dumped into the lake.

Boats were procured and the coroner's men began dragging the bottom. Several times the grapnels traversed the lake bottom.

Then suddenly a cry went up.

The men began pulling on the ropes. Some object was rising.

Up it came and rested on the surface. A shuddering cry went up. It was a human body.

Mr. Black, with pallid face and heaving breast, paced the shore. The body was slowly and gently drawn up onto the sandy beach.

Very slowly and gently the coroner and his men straightened the remains and partly covered them with a sheet.

The detectives made a brief examination.

The body was that of a female of slender and graceful build. But it was frightfully mutilated.

The head had been severed from the body and was missing.

Bruises and contusions discolored the flesh and there was a knife wound in the side. All traces of blood had been removed by the action of the water.

Old King Brady lifted one arm. The hand had been severed at the wrist.

"Mr. Black," said the coroner, quietly, "is there any mark by which you can identify your daughter other than upon the head?"

"I think so," said the agonized father.

He came forward and bent down over the corpse. But his horror and grief overcame him.

"I—I fear it is the body of my child," he said. "There can be no doubt of it. The ring found on the severed hand is ample evidence."

"You are convinced?"

"Yes."

"What disposition shall I make of the remains?"

"Prepare them for burial and shipment to Portland."

Very solemnly the little group returned to their carriages. The body was placed in the coroner's wagon.

Then the return to Greenbush was made.

Very little was said.

The Bradys were deep in study. Everybody else seemed entranced with awful horror.

When they once more stood in the hotel office the Bradys felt like talking. Old King Brady addressed Gray:

"You can form no opinion as to the identity of the man who drove the wagon that night?"

"Not the slightest," replied Gray. "I couldn't see his face."

"It is very strange."

"Indeed, I agree with you."

That night the detectives were once more engaged in deduction in their room.

"We're befogged," said Harry.

"To the contrary, the case never looked so clear before," said Old King Brady.

"Well, that's queer," he exclaimed. "What is your theory?"

"We have at last hit the right track."

"You are obscure."

"Am I? Well, then, I will be more explicit. In the first place, the crime has been proved."

"Yes."

"The finding of the body settles all doubt that a murder was committed."

"So it seems."

"Also, the body seems to be that of the missing young girl from Portland."

"Very good."

"Now, the story given us by Gray is very straightforward."

"It seems to be."

"Keep your eye on Blodget."

Harry was astonished.

"At this stage of the game," he said, "I don't see how he can possibly be in any way connected with the case."

"You don't?"

"No."

Old King Brady chuckled.

"The old man can yet give you points," he said with elation. "Did you not hear Blodget remark to Gray that this meant one hundred thousand dollars, which Black had offered for the return of his daughter, dead or alive?"

"Well, I believe Black did say that."

"Very good. How quickly Gray showed up apropos of that offer, and how quickly the body was recovered. Blodget was more than certain when he announced that he could produce a clew as to the girl's whereabouts."

Harry's eyes opened wide.

"By Jove!" he said. "It is quite clear now. They are a brace of rogues! It is all a put-up job."

"Of course."

To both detectives this looked plain.

But there was much to consider in the way of obstacles. How was proof of all this to be gained?

They might be morally certain of their premise, but this amounted to nothing in a court of law. There the evidence must be indisputable.

"What shall we do?" asked Harry. "Mr. Black ought not to pay that money?"

"We will post him and advise him to delay."

"Exactly."

There was a moment of silence.

"Well," said Harry, "we have only one conclusion to assume. That is, that Gray is the abductor and murderer, and Blodget is the spy and capper, or go-between. The job was originally intended otherwise. The girl was to be held alive and yielded up for suitable ransom. But she made so bold a struggle that Gray was obliged to kill her to save exposure. Then the villains arranged this clever method of producing the body and gaining the ransom just the same. The severed hand was all a trick to lead on an investigation. It was all a deep and devilish plot."

"To think of finding such work in a little down East town!"

"You are right."

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE AROOSTOOK ROAD.

The old detective's astonishing declaration staggered Harry.

"We are morally sure of all now. We have our birds placed."

"That is true."

"But we must not let them suspect it. Evidence is what we must win now. It looks like a slow job. But we've been in the fog before—eh?"

"You are right."

"Now let us interview Mr. Black. He must not pay the reward yet."

The next morning the Bradys made it a point to see Mr. Black before either Blodget or Gray could do so.

"We understand that you offered a reward of one hundred thousand dollars for your daughter's body, dead or alive?" asked Old King Brady.

Mr. Black bowed.

"I did," he replied.

"You intend to pay it?"

"I always meet my obligations."

"In this case, perhaps you will do well to evade them, at least do not be in a hurry to pay over that hundred thousand."

The millionaire was amazed.

"What do you mean?" he asked. "I do not understand."

"For the fact that you may be paying the reward to the very parties who are responsible for the abduction and murder of your daughter."

Mr. Black gave a gasping cry of horror.

"What?" he exclaimed. "Do I hear aright? Do you refer to Blodget and Gray?"

"We do."

"My soul! Are you sure of that? I cannot understand. It seems too absurd. Why, what reason have you for that belief?"

In a very few words Old King Brady pointed out his views of the case. Mr. Black listened with interest.

A true comprehension seemed to dawn upon him.

"Merciful powers!" he ejaculated. "I would never have thought of that. Ah, you detectives are keen. Remember, I have offered a large reward for the conviction of the guilty parties."

"That is not what actuates us," replied Old King Brady. "We are detectives, and we work to subserve the ends of justice, as all detectives should, irrespective of reward or pay."

"And you really believe that Gray is the murderer of Janice?"

"We are going to proceed on that presumption," replied Old King Brady.

"I will kill him on sight!"

"No, no!" interposed the old detective. "That won't do."

"Why not? Can you blame me?"

"But we have not yet positively proven him guilty."

"There is no doubt of his guilt."

"Again, it will be a poor way of securing vengeance. You are a law-abiding man, Mr. Black."

"I have always been such."

"Then you will see the wisdom and justice of leaving all to the law. Punishment will be certain."

Black drew a convulsive sigh.

"You are right," he agreed. "I shall accept your advice."

"Then do not pay them the reward as yet. You can easily put them off."

"Very well."

The Bradys felt that this matter was settled. As Old King Brady had predicted, Blodget that very day applied to Mr. Black for the reward.

The millionaire very skillfully managed to put the villain off. Blodget and Gray retired to a corner of the piazza, where they remained in close consultation for a time.

Then Gray marched up to the hotel desk.

"Well, landlord," he said in a loud voice, "I fear I shall have to take my departure. I have some orders for my Rheumatism Killer in the towns above here, so I shall leave to-day."

"Very sorry, doctor," said Clark in his affable way. "Here is your bill."

"Well, I wish I could stay longer," declared Gray. "But business is business, you know."

"Of course, of course."

The "doctor" settled his bill, and in a few moments a carriage drove up to the door.

A high-stepping gray horse and top carriage it was. The "doctor" stepped into the carriage, waved an adieu and drove away.

Meanwhile the Bradys had made quick work.

During their stay in the town, for the purpose of getting about rapidly, they had procured a tandem bicycle.

This was kept in the stable at the rear of the hotel.

When Gray first declared his intention of departure the Bradys from an inner room heard it plainly.

"What's this?" exclaimed Old King Brady. "It's a new game!"

"We ought not to lose sight of him," declared Harry.

"Certainly not."

"He is our most important man."

"Yes."

"What shall we do?"

"Follow him."

"How?"

"You forget the tandem."

"That is so."

So while the "doctor's" horse and carriage was at the door, the detectives slipped out the back way and very quickly and silently got out their machine and rode into a side street.

A few moments later, in the dusk—for the day was at its close—the pseudo vendor of patent medicines drove out of town by way of the main street.

His course took him out upon the old Aroostook Road, which led into the heart of the Maine wilderness.

And as he drove on he was unaware of the fact that a silent and swift pursuer was behind him.

Soon the darkness became so intense that the detectives were enabled to draw closer on their silent steed.

Through the long swamp of fir and hackmatack, over the corduroy roads, the villain drove.

Miles spun away behind, and still the tireless little horse kept on resolutely and steadily.

It was after midnight when suddenly the "doctor" drew rein.

Beside the road was a gushing spring where travelers could water their horses.

While the horse was drinking, Gray got out of the carriage.

The detectives had dismounted and drawn into the shadows by the roadside. Here they waited.

But not for long.

Gray placed his fingers to his lips and gave a shrill, sibilant whistle.

It resounded again and again through the forest arches.

It was not long before the answer came. It was in the same key.

Then there was a crashing sound in the undergrowth and a man's form emerged into the road.

"Hello, Kelley!" cried Gray. "You are right on hand."

"Yes. I knew your signal. I've been waiting patiently for it."

"How is the bird?"

"Still drooping, but I guess all right otherwise. What is the latest?"

"We've made a big strike."

"What do ye mean?"

"The hundred thousand is ours safe and sound. We landed the prize!"

"The devil you did! How?"

"Well, we discovered the girl's body for them and turned it over to the doting and grief-stricken father for the reward. Ha! ha! ha! Was not that a rich deal? I tell you Johnson is all right!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE DEN IN THE WOODS.

The mocking laugh of the villain rang out shrill and clear.

Kelley seemed to take a moment to see the point of the statement, and then he laughed also.

"Ha! ha! ha! Well, that was a rich one! It's what I call a double-header!"

"You bet! It's selling a dead horse for the price of a live one."

"He is an easy sucker!"

"Yes; but the detectives were fooled too."

"Keen, aren't they? It's lucky then that I didn't kill the old chap."

"Indeed yes. The reward plan was easier and cheaper and saved the risk of the gallows. What is more, the game now is all mine."

"All ours!"

"Well, yes, all ours. Of course you get your division of the hundred thousand."

"That's all I want."

"I get my share."

"Yes."

"Johnson gets his."

"Just so."

"That's about thirty-three thousand apiece. It will do for a starter."

"Will Johnson be dead sure to get the money?"

"You can bet all the money you ever saw on it. The old chap has promised, and he won't break it. He has taken the corpse home to bury."

"Whew! that is a corker! Well, now it's my game to pick up another rich flat. Of course you're in the game?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Why?" asked Kelley, sharply. "What's come over you?"

"You don't understand. I am in love!"

"In love?"

"Yes."

"Well, what difference does that make?"

"Just this: After I marry, I am going to reform and go out of politics, so to speak. You know my fiancee has a million back of her."

Kelley laughed discordantly.

"Yes, but you haven't got her consent as yet."

"No, but she is in my power, and you know possession is nine points of the law. I don't fear defeat."

"Well, I wish you success. I suppose you'll make up with the father-in-law?"

"No," said Gray in a constrained voice. "Your part of the job is not finished yet."

"What do you mean?" asked the treacherous valet.

"Do you need to ask that? You fully agreed to put my father-in-law out of the way. My wife will then inherit, and the rest is easy."

Kelley laughed discordantly.

"You are a devil, Gray!" he said. "Of course I'll carry out my contract. But you've got to tame your pretty gazelle first. I tell you it will not be easy."

"Ah, then she is spirited, is she?"

"Somewhat."

"All the better. I couldn't love her if she was easily won. But she will come to my terms. I'll have her at my feet in a month. She shall be my slave."

"Well, you're welcome to her," answered the valet. "I never fool with women. You're bound to get your fingers burned."

"Well, you're not cut out for it. However, we are losing time. I want to take a look at my pretty bird. She deserves a better cage."

With this Gray got into the carriage.

Kelley did the same.

The detectives had heard all with the deepest of interest.

They saw the carriage turn into a narrow road leading into the forest. At once they proceeded to follow.

"We are onto something of value now," whispered Harry.

"You're right!" said Old King Brady. "Once again we have made wrong deductions."

"What do you mean?"

"Can't you guess?"

Harry gave a violent start.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "It has just come to me. Of course I can see it all now. Janice Black——"

"Is alive!"

"Yes, alive, and a captive still. The body found in the lake was but a substitute to deceive Mr. Black and gain the reward. What a clever game to end all further pursuit by thus establishing the death of the abducted girl!"

"At last we are getting at the bottom of the mystery."

"Don't say that."

"Why?"

"Several times before we have yielded to that belief, only to be deceived. We can only guess what may yet be in store."

"That is true. But there is every reason to believe that Gray fell in love with Janice after the abduction and decided to marry her, kill the father and thus inherit his fortune, getting a beautiful girl and a million dollars."

"A diabolical plot!"

"Only exceeded by the fiendishness of the villain's soul. If Janice Black is alive and in captivity, we will rescue her this night."

"We will."

With these conclusions and the final resolution, the detectives kept on in pursuit of their birds.

For a long ways the horse and carriage jolted slowly over the corduroy road of the swamp.

The detectives had been compelled to leave their bicycle behind.

But it was easy enough to keep up with the carriage on foot. Thus they trudged slowly on.

After an hour of this sort of traveling a light suddenly showed ahead.

Then the carriage came out into a lonely clearing in the forest.

A log cabin occupied its centre. There was every indication that it was the abode of wood-choppers, or at least had once served that purpose.

"Was Mother Jaques expecting me to-night?" asked Gray.

"No," replied Kelley. "But I felt sure you'd come, so I went out to the road to meet you."

"She has the girl pretty well under subjection?"

"You bet! You couldn't have picked a better woman than Mother Jaques for this business."

"I think so too."

As Gray leaped out of the carriage he gave a shrill whistle.

Instantly the door of the cabin swung wide open.

A flood of light swept out into the clearing. From the shadows the detectives saw part of the interior of the cabin.

It was rudely furnished, though, unlike most of its kind, it was divided into several compartments or rooms.

In the doorway, arms akimbo, stood a wrinkled old harridan. She hailed the newcomers in a snarling voice:

"So ther hawk has come fer the dove, eh? Well, ye'll find her feathers all unruffled, thanks ter me."

"That's the way to talk, Mother," cried Gray, leaping into the cabin. "I must take a look at her."

Then the door closed.

The detectives were anxious to see the interior of the cabin and learn what was going on there.

But they decided upon a different move, which was suggested by policy and expediency.

Old King Brady whispered the plan to Harry.

The young detective instantly diverged to the right, while Old King Brady went to the left.

Their purpose was soon made apparent.

The treacherous valet Kelley had begun to unhitch the gray horse. He was thus occupied when a startling accident befell him.

Suddenly from behind him long arms stretched out and talon fingers closed upon his windpipe.

He was unable to scream or make a sound of any kind.

He tried to wrench himself free, but in vain. In a twinkling handcuffs were placed on his wrists.

He was thrown upon his back and bound hand and feet with a rope taken from the carriage.

He was securely gagged, and thus rendered helpless he was left upon the ground.

The detectives now tethered the horse. Then they sped to the window of the cabin.

They peered in through the dim glass and beheld a dramatic scene.

Upon a rude hearth blazed a fire. The harridan was seated upon a stool at the far end of the room.

Crouched against the fire frame with a burning brand plucked from the fire in her hand, stood a young girl of rare and wondrous beauty.

It was easy to understand how Gray had fallen in love with Janice Black as one gazed upon her.

She was of a type of beauty seldom seen, and such as would appeal to the passion of the coldest and sternest.

Before her stood Gray, grinning, but yet angry and baffled.

"Come, come, you spiteful little termagant," he cried. "You might as well surrender. I will have a kiss."

"And I say you will not, except in death," declared the young girl vehemently. "One step nearer and I'll burn your eyes out."

"Bravo!" whispered Old King Brady.

"I glory in her spunk," asserted Harry.

"It is useless for you to resist me," declared the villain impatiently. "You are my captive. I can keep you here forever. No one can ever find you. You might as well give up."

"Never!"

"I will make you happy. I will love you as man never loved woman. Will you not yield?"

"I will yield to death, but not to you," replied the girl captive.

"Hang it. You are getting me mad," declared Gray.

"I will never yield."

"What are your reasons?"

"You are a villain. I hate you. Is not that enough?"

"But I'll teach you to love me. I am not a bad man. You shall see that I can make you happy."

"Your words are idle."

A curse escaped Gray.

"Then you will not come to terms?"

"The only terms I will accept are my freedom and safe conduct home," replied the young girl.

"Curse you! If you will not listen to fair treatment, then you will yield to force, I warn you."

With this the villain darted forward.

Janice screamed and thrust the brand at him. It singed his brow and caused him to retreat with a yell of cowardly agony. The first assault was repulsed.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY.

The Bradys could have cheered themselves hoarse over the result of this attack by the villain.

The old harridan did not interfere, but sat crooning on her stool in the corner.

The wounds sustained by Gray stung and smarted, as well as enraged him.

His brute temper was aroused.

It was in keeping with his nature that he should destroy anything which he could not win. So with a howl of rage he pulled out a revolver.

"Curse you!" he yelled, "I'll kill you!"

Crack!

The shot was fired almost point-blank, but yet it went wild, and the bullet was buried in the logs back of Janice.

Whether this was intentional on the villain's part, it was not easy to say. It might be that he purposely sent the shot wide, and that he had merely fired to frighten her.

But if this latter was the case it was certainly a dismal failure.

The young girl betrayed not the slightest fear. She hurled the brand at her persecutor and grabbed another from the fire.

The brand struck Gray across the hand and caused him to drop the revolver. With a howl of pain and anger he again rushed upon her.

This time he might have succeeded in his purpose, but an eerie cry from the old harridan caused him to turn.

It was just in time for him to see the two Bradys coming in at the door.

The two detectives had made up their mind that it was time to act, and act they did with great dispatch.

Gray whirled to meet them, and roared like a mad lion.

"Who are you? Why do you intrude here?"

"We are detectives," cried Old King Brady, "and you are our prisoner."

"Detectives!" yelled the villain. "Then die, curse you."

What followed was entirely unexpected by the detectives.

They had fancied the game already won. The odds certainly seemed in their favor.

But Gray gave an ear-splitting whistle. The effect was startling.

From the rafters overhead, where they had been sleeping on a platform, half a dozen woodsmen fell into the middle of the cabin floor.

Every one was armed with a revolver and covered the detectives.

It was a startling and unexpected denouement. Had the

Bradys expected anything of this kind they would have delayed their attack.

"Shoot! Kill!" yelled Gray, fiercely, and rushed upon the Bradys.

Harry was loth to fire at such point-blank range, but self-preservation is instinctive.

The bullet, however, only cut a furrow in the villain's shoulder. Then before Harry could fire again he was grappled by his foe.

Old King Brady had fired twice at his assailants. But both shots went wide. They rushed upon him like wolves and bore him to the floor.

The detectives could not cope with such odds, and in less time than it takes to tell it they were prisoners and being tightly bound.

"Tie 'em up!" roared Gray. "Ha, ha, ha! What luck! The devil has played the game quite into my hands. So they were onto us! Well, that's a revelation. Where is Kelley?"

"Didn't he come home with you?" asked one of the woodsmen.

"Yes. Go out and find him," commanded Gray.

Then he turned upon the detectives.

For several moments he hurled taunts and jeers at them. Then followed malevolent threats and execrations.

But finally curiosity overcame him, and he quieted down.

"How did you come to follow me here?" he asked. "Did you suspect me?"

"We did," replied Old King Brady, "and it seems with good cause."

"I'll own up to it. Of course you know now that the gal is alive?"

"We do."

A frightful grin contorted the villain's face.

"Do you know what that means to you? You cannot go away from here alive."

"Murder seems to be a matter of little compunction with you," said Old King Brady.

The villain scowled.

"Don't be impudent," he gritted.

Just at this moment Kelley entered with the wood-choppers. They had found him bound and gagged.

Kelly was evilly triumphant.

"Hooray!" he shouted. "This is a piece of luck for us, Gus. If those fellows had got away from here with what they knew——"

"It would have been up with us."

"Well, you bet."

"Dead men tell no tales."

"Exactly."

The woodsmen, who seemed to be in the employ of Gray, were a lawless, evil-looking crew.

It was useless to expect assistance from them.

The Bradys saw that their position was a most desperate one. Yet they were self-possessed.

"And you followed me all the way from Greenbush?" asked Gray.

"We did," agreed Old King Brady.

"Well, when did you begin to suspect me?" persisted Gray.

"That is my business."

"You won't tell?"

"It is unnecessary."

"Humph! Perhaps so. Well, we fooled the old man anyway. He thinks he has his daughter's body."

"I'll admit that you fooled us," said the old detective. "But we are decidedly onto you now."

"That's all the good it will do you."

"Then you really mean to murder us?"

"You cannot go from here alive."

"We will be avenged. You cannot conceal the crime. The young girl whom you will force to be your wife will be the first to betray you."

"I will never become his wife," said Janice courageously.

A curse escaped Gray.

His cruel eyes snapped.

"We'll see," he gritted. "I'm a hard man to defeat. Yet I'm not altogether merciless. On certain conditions I will spare your lives."

The detectives looked incredulous.

"What are they?"

"You are to league yourselves with me. Detectives can be bought. They invariably work for money. Here is your chance. Become my partner and you shall have wealth and life."

"We will consider your offer," said Old King Brady.

"I will give you until to-morrow noon," declared Gray. "I don't want to kill you, for I know you are smart men. You will do better to stand in with us."

The Bradys pretended to lean that way, and give serious consideration to the proposal.

Of course this was policy. Hope at once revived in their hearts.

"We want a little chance to talk it over," said Old King Brady in a temporizing way.

"Of course," agreed Gray. "I won't deny ye that. I'll not make it more uncomfortable for you than I can help. Here, Baxter," to one of the woodsmen, "cut the cords which bind their ankles.

This was done.

Of course this was a great relief to the detectives.

Their wrists remained bound, but not tightly. They were led into a room in the cabin and the door was closed and barred.

There were a couple of bunks filled with fir boughs, a number of rude stools and a table. A small window barred with iron was at one end.

The detectives were left in utter darkness, save the thread of light which came in through the cracks of the door.

They could peer through these cracks, however, and see what was going on in the main part of the cabin.

Gray and Kelley had seated themselves at a table, which the old harridan had set with broken dishes for a meal.

The wood-choppers were grouped about the fire listening to the conversation, while Janice had disappeared.

A movement in the adjoining room assured the detectives that she was in there.

A black bottle was on the table, and Gray and Kelley were helping themselves liberally to its contents.

Gray seemed especially loquacious.

"Another week and we will be out of this," he declared. "Everything is in our favor. Fate has played the game right into our hands."

"I don't trust these cursed detectives as you do," said Kelley.

"Once on our side they are the best allies we can have," declared Gray.

"Yes, if you can be sure of it."

"What do you mean?"

"How easy it would be for them to pretend to fall in with us and then at a favorable moment betray us."

Gray shook his head.

"We will bind them by sacred oaths."

"Bah! What does that amount to?"

"What?" exclaimed Gray, bending a keen gaze upon Kelley. "Would you dare to break the oath?"

"Why, no!" stammered the valet. "But I am a crook, as well as the rest. The Bradys are not."

"Detectives are the next thing to crooks in their methods. It takes a crook to catch a crook, and the crooked work of detectives is always on the same line."

"That may be."

"Yes, and you never saw a detective who could not be bought."

Kelly made a deprecatory gesture.

"All right, I'll yield," he declared. "I only hope your plan will not fail. I would not like to get caught myself. I wouldn't face old man Black again for all the money in the world."

"If you're chicken-hearted——"

"No, no! Let it go. It's all right. I'm not squealing. Here's to success," cried Kelley, draining the whisky glass.

"I drink to it," cried Gray, following the example. "Now to get down to business. Within a few days Blodget or rather Johnson will get that money."

"The hundred thousand?"

"Yes."

Kelley rubbed his hands.

"That will be a happy day," he said delightfully. "You'll see me on a steamer for the old country next."

"I don't care where you go after the little job I have on hand is off," said Gray. "I want to secure the services of a minister of the right kind. The girl may make a little objection, but we'll overrule that. She must be my wife."

CHAPTER IX.

A DARING ESCAPE.

"Humph!" said Kelley with a coarse laugh. "I never was in love but once. I thought that a woman was the next thing to an angel."

"Well, the right kind of a woman is."

"Very true, if you find that kind."

"Didn't you have luck?"

"Well, the luck I had was exceedingly queer. I married

and everything went along all smooth for a while. One day I came home to find that the bird had flown."

"She left you?"

"Yes. Ran away with a handsomer man," said Kelley lugubriously.

Gray laughed uproariously.

"I can hardly conceive that," he said sarcastically. "I am sure her taste was very bad."

"No, I was the one with the bad taste. Since then I've never placed faith in woman."

Gray's eyes snapped.

"That's all right," he said. "But a girl like the one in that room yonder will die for the man she loves."

"Does she love you?"

"She will."

"Are you sure?"

"I will make her. Oh, don't you think I am capable of making a woman happy?"

"I don't know," said Kelley abstractedly. "I've given up the job. Well, you go ahead with your love affair. Let me have my money and I'll trouble you no more."

"Ah, but I want your assistance."

"In what way?" asked Kelley.

"I want you to find a minister and bring him here. Tell him the bride is a little bit shy. I have a drug which I can give her which will so stupefy her that she will make any answer I demand. We can fool the divine."

At this Kelley demurred.

He professed a great distaste for the job. But finally Gray prevailed.

It was arranged that he was to start the next day in quest of a clergyman.

The Bradys listened to all this with some interest.

Then the subject was changed.

Gray diverged upon other matters, embracing certain crooked jobs in New York and other places, which he had in prospect.

Then he laughed coarsely and said:

"You say women are dangerous things to meddle with, Kelley. We make a cool hundred thousand out of this one."

"You haven't got your money yet."

"No, but I'll get it, don't you fear."

"I hope so."

"That isn't all. If I get tired of my bride and she wants to leave me I'll notify the old man that she is alive, and perhaps he'll pay another hundred thousand to get her back."

Kelley laughed derisively at this. He was plainly skeptical.

Then the woodsmen joined in the conversation, which became rude and very boisterous.

Finally all gathered about the table for a game of cards.

At this juncture the attention of the detectives was diverted. A new incident claimed their interest.

A gentle tapping on the wall of the room next them caused both to turn.

"What was that?" whispered Harry.

Old King Brady placed an ear to the partition.

Again came the gentle tapping, this time very clear and distinct. Old King Brady at once made reply.

Then he placed his lips to the partition and spoke very distinctly, but low. It was not probable that those in the outer cabin could hear him.

"Is that you, Miss Black?" he asked.

"It is," replied the young girl. "You are detectives, I know."

"We are."

"You have come to rescue me?"

"Yes."

"Do you bring word from my father?"

"He is well, but has been deceived by these villains, and believes you dead. He will be overjoyed to learn that you are alive."

"Ah, but the fate which threatens me may prevent my ever seeing him again in life."

"I would advise you not to despair, Miss Black."

"But the chances look bad. It does not seem likely that you can give me much assistance now."

"We may be able to yet effect your rescue. That will be our most earnest endeavor."

"Ah, do you think it possible?" asked the young girl eagerly.

"It is by no means beyond the range of possibility."

"Have you any plan?"

"We are considering one now."

"Oh, I believe it might be possible to make an escape, if you could only make your way into this room," said Janice, eagerly. "There is a broad window opening out upon a platform in the rear of the cabin. If I could get to you I could quickly cut your bonds."

"Have you a knife?"

"Yes. I secreted it in my room a number of days ago."

Old King Brady replied:

"Then the thing is not impossible, Miss Black. This partition is made of pine boards and is very thin. Can you not cut a small aperture and pass the knife through to us?"

"Wait," said Harry, quickly. "I think there is a knot-hole just above your head, partner. See if the knife cannot be passed through that."

Old King Brady communicated this fact to the young girl.

The result was gratifying.

The hilt of the knife was passed through the knot-hole.

Old King Brady caught it in his teeth. The knife was in the possession of the Bradys.

"By Jove!" whispered Harry with delight. "Everything is coming our way, partner."

"That is right," agreed the old detective. "Now can you hold the knife, Harry?"

The old detective transferred the knife to Harry's hands. Then the two prisoners stood back to back.

It did not take long to cut the bonds at the old detective's wrists by passing the blade back and forth.

Old King Brady was free.

He took the knife and cut Harry's bonds with one slash.

But just at this moment a startling incident occurred.

Just as the detectives believed escape within their reach,

one of the gang in the cabin advanced and lifted the latch of the door.

The detectives dropped and placed their wrists back of them in the manner they had been tied.

The door swung open and the fellow peered in.

"Are they all right, Smith?" asked Gray, looking up from the table.

"You bet they are," said the wood-chopper, ejecting a quid of tobacco into Old King Brady's face. "I reckon they'll not be able to untie them ropes to-night."

The door slammed and the detectives were left alone again. Both drew a breath of relief.

"Jupiter!" exclaimed Harry. "That's what I call a close shave."

"Quick work is what is needed now," said the old detective.

Both were again upon their feet.

Harry stationed himself at the crack in the door to keep watch of those in the outer cabin.

Old King Brady worked with agility and dispatch.

He cut the woodwork around the bars at the window.

Then one by one he skillfully removed them. In a short while he had the job completed.

It was now easy for him to draw himself up and out of the window. He dropped down upon the ground outside.

In a moment Harry followed him. The two detectives were free.

It would have been an easy matter to have slipped away into the gloom and soon have been beyond pursuit.

But the Bradys had no such idea in mind. They would not leave without an attempt at least to rescue Janice.

Around the end of the cabin they crept and soon were under the window of the girl prisoner's room.

Harry stood upon Old King Brady's shoulders and reached the sash. As he did so in the darkness a fair face appeared near his.

Janice had heard and understood all.

"You are safe," she whispered. "Oh, heaven be praised for that."

"Yes, we are at liberty at least," replied Harry. "Now the next thing is to get you safely out."

"Oh, will that be possible? It seems far too good to be true."

"It is not only possible, but likely we shall return you safely to your father's arms very shortly."

"I pray that may be true."

"Now, I will ask of you to keep watch at the door of this room. If the villains come this way let me know."

"I will do so," replied Janice, eagerly.

She slipped down from the window and went to the door. She patiently kept watch there.

While Harry worked away at the window bars.

It was slow work.

He was compelled to put his wrists through the bars and work from the inside, which was awkward.

Old King Brady, of course, was unable to hold him for such a length of time upon his back, so an empty barrel was found upon which the young detective stood.

In this way he was able to work with such effect that in the course of an hour he had removed the bars.

All this while the woodsmen in the cabin kept up a great clatter over their cards.

This was in the rescuers' favor, for it effectually drowned any noise they made.

Now that the bars were removed the rest was easy.

The detectives assisted Janice through the window.

She was a moment later in the outer air, and liberty was before her. But just at that moment steps were heard approaching the cabin.

The Bradys and their fair charge crouched down in the gloom.

It was a moment of suspense.

But it did not last long.

The newcomer opened the door of the cabin and entered. A boisterous uproar showed that he was expected and welcome.

"All right," whispered Old King Brady. "We are safe so far. Now to make our escape certain."

"How will we ever find our way out of this waste?" asked Harry.

"Really, I do not know the way at all," said Janice. "It was very dark when I was brought in here."

"I have a plan," said the old detective.

"You have?" exclaimed Harry. "I am curious to know what it can be."

"Come and I'll show you."

CHAPTER X.

A HAPPY RESTORATION.

Old King Brady led the way through the gloom to the little shed which served as a stable for the horse.

The animal was munching its hay as the fugitives appeared.

"Ah, you do not mean to take the team?" asked Harry.

"That is the idea exactly," replied the old detective. "You cannot expect Miss Black to walk all that distance in the dark."

"Why, I think it is a capital idea," declared Harry.

Very quickly the horse was harnessed by the light of Old King Brady's pocket lantern.

The carriage was noiselessly hauled down to the little narrow road which led into the clearing.

There the horse was hitched to it.

Janice got into the carriage and the detectives walked one upon each side of the horse.

This was necessary, for in no other way in the darkness could they see the road.

Thus they kept on for some distance.

The light from the cabin had faded from view, and the detectives believed that they were well out into the swamp, when a loud din was heard in the distance.

"There you go," cried Harry. "Our escape has been discovered."

"That seems to be true," agreed the old detective.

"If we only had a smooth road now we could laugh at pursuit."

"We must make the best of it as it is."

"Oh, certainly. We have the start."

"But they may overtake us," cried Janice nervously. "You see they know these roads like a printed book."

"There is the idea," cried Old King Brady. "The odds are against us."

"It is a pity we have no weapons."

"Indeed, that is so."

But the detectives urged the horse on at its fastest walk. Bumping over the corduroy road, it was slow progress at best.

Janice was eager to get out and abandon the team.

But the detectives would not hear to this.

"Not yet," said Old King Brady. "That may yet become necessary, but for the present we will spare your strength."

On pushed the fugitives.

The uproar in the distance became louder. Voices were heard pitched in a high key. It was evident that they were searching for the escaped prisoners.

That they were not long in getting the trail was evident. The sounds of pursuit were plain now.

It was a question now of reaching the highway before the gang. Old King Brady urged the horse on.

And now they came to a passably smooth part of the road.

Old King Brady leaped into the carriage and cried:

"Get aboard, Harry. Here is where we will gain on them a little."

Then the old detective lashed the horse into a gallop. For a mile or more he was able to keep up this gait.

This gave the fugitives a vast advantage. They came once more to a rough part of the road.

But they had gained such an immense distance that they felt warranted in the belief that they would surely reach the highway in safety.

But once more the sounds of pursuit became near at hand. Lights were flashing in their rear and it seemed as if they would surely have to abandon the horse.

But just at this moment they came to an ascent. The sound of falling water was heard, and Old King Brady cried:

"Saved! We have come to the highway."

"Hurrah!" cried Harry. "That is the truth. We are victors."

A moment later the highway was reached. They were not a moment too soon.

Pistol shots sounded and the bullets whistled past them. The detectives sprang into the carriage. Down the highway they dashed at furious speed.

The pursuers were, of course, easily distanced. The rescue was complete.

So it happened that the next morning a number of people sat on the piazza of the Greenbush Hotel and were rewarded with an astounding sight.

Up to the door drove a carriage. It had three occupants.

Two were men and the third was a young girl whose yellow hair gleamed ruddily in the sunshine.

"Jericho!" exclaimed Jefferson Clark, springing to his feet. "Here's the detectives! Where have they been?"

But a man of elderly appearance who sat at the end of the piazza suddenly sprang up with a great cry.

He dashed down the hotel steps like a madman.

"Janice! Janice! my child! Is it you or am I mad or dreaming?"

"Father!" cried the young girl joyfully. "You are not dreaming. It is a reality."

Rafael Black stood for a moment like one in a stupor.

Janice rushed into his arms. He blinked and stared and felt of her face in a puzzled way.

"It is, it is, my own child," he cried. "A miracle has been done. I have seen you dead."

"No, father," asserted Janice, "I have been very much alive all the time. But I have been a captive in the hands of my enemies."

Black turned to the detectives.

"Tell me," he demanded, "is this true? Am I dreaming? Can it be a reality?"

"It is all true, sir," declared Old King Brady. "It was all a hoax perpetrated by the villain Gray."

"But the body——"

"That was deception. The villains expected to defraud you of the reward you promised."

"Then, how does it happen? Whose body is it?"

"An anatomical subject. You know Gray is a medical student. Janice will tell you that they took the ring from her by force which was found upon the severed hand."

Rafael Black's face cleared.

"I see it all!" he cried. "I can understand it now. What a fiendish game. And that villain Gray was at the bottom of it all."

"Aided by your treacherous valet."

"Kelley? Ah, did you see him?"

"Yes."

Rafael Black grasped the detectives' hands ardently.

"Name your reward," he cried. "You may have my whole fortune."

"We ask no reward," declared Old King Brady. "We have not finished the case yet."

"So far as I am concerned you need go no further."

"No, but the law must be subserved. We must capture the villains and bring them to justice."

"Well, I wish you success. But you have made me the happiest man on earth."

"And me the happiest girl," cried Janice.

"Then we are well repaid," said Harry, gallantly.

"Nonsense! I shall see that you are amply rewarded," cried the delighted millionaire. "But let me know as soon as you have captured the villains. I am interested."

"I will do so," agreed Old King Brady. "But there is a gentleman here in this hotel in whom I am deeply interested."

"Who is that?"

"Mr. Cyrus Blodget, alias Joe Johnson," replied the detective.

"He was on the piazza when you drove up. I do not see him now."

"It is as I expected," said Old King Brady. "He has

given us the slip. Ah, well, we will trip him before he goes far."

It was true that Blodget had decamped. He could not be found about the hotel.

Of course the denouement just described created a profound sensation, not only in the town, but elsewhere.

The news spread like wildfire.

The corpse of the unknown female was returned to the coroner, who took charge of it pending a further investigation.

Rafael Black returned to Portland with Janice. At their home they met with the heartiest of congratulations.

The mystery of the country town had been solved.

But the case was not ended.

The Bradys had yet to trap their birds and bring them to justice. This promised to be a lively job.

The detectives procured a posse of men and went back instantly to the loggers' camp.

But not one of the gang could be found. They had vanished completely and had left no trail behind.

Cyrus Blodget, the lounger and countryman, was seen no more about the Greenbush Hotel.

The Bradys made a thorough but ineffective search. It was many days ere they got a clew.

They regretted extremely their oversight in failing to trap Blodget.

It could easily have been done had they gone about it right. By driving up to the hotel so openly it had given the bird a chance to fly.

But at this stage of the game the Bradys were lucky enough to strike upon a clew immediately.

One day while sitting on the piazza of the hotel Old King Brady gave a start and ejaculated:

"Eureka! Do you see that fellow, Harry?"

"By Jove! I guess I do."

"You know him?"

"Well, rather."

Trustworthy Old King Brady sprang up and descended the hotel steps. A man came along the street to the hotel entrance.

He was a type of backwoodsman, with bushy whiskers and tanned skin. He stood a moment looking into the hotel.

"Hello, my man!" exclaimed Old King Brady. "What is your name?"

"Eh?" ejaculated the fellow. "What's that to you?"

"I'll make it evident to you pretty quick if you don't tell me."

The fellow frowned.

"Who be you?"

The detective showed his star.

"I want the truth from you," said he, sternly. "I am an officer of the law. You must answer. What is your name?"

The backwoodsman relaxed his defiant attitude.

"My name is Hannibal Smith," he declared. "I'm a wood-man."

"Yes, I can see that. Were you ever in the employ of Gus Gray?"

Smith gave a start, and his face turned livid. He stammered, but replied:

"No."

"Look here," said the old detective, angrily. "You are lying to me."

CHAPTER XI.

INTO THE WILDS.

The big backwoodsman bent a lowering gaze upon the detective. But Old King Brady met it.

"You are lying and you know it."

"Wall, what's it to you?"

"A good deal. I know you're crooked. You were one of his thieving, murderous gang. Now if you want to save your neck you'll answer me."

"Wall, go ahead."

"Good enough. When did you leave the logging camp in Black Swamp?"

"A week ago," replied Smith sullenly.

"Where have you been?"

"Into the woods."

"Where is Gray?"

"He is in the woods."

"Yes, but what particular locality. The truth, now."

The detective looked searchingly and penetratingly at Smith.

The wood-chopper broke down.

"All right, boss," he said abjectly. "I'll tell ye all, if ye'll use me white."

"Do that, and I'll pay you a good reward," said Old King Brady.

"That settles it. I'll turn turtle. I never did hitch with Gray, anyway."

"Good enough. Let's hear it."

"Wall," said the backwoodsman, "Gray an' Johnson are both at a place called White Ash Portage up near Moosehead."

"Do you know the exact locality?"

"Yes."

"Well, you will guide us thither?"

"Is there anything in it?" asked the fellow, sharply.

"Yes. Five hundred dollars."

The fellow's eyes danced.

"I'm your huckleberry," he cried. "I'd sell my brother out for that."

"You are serving the law and winning a reward at the same time," said Old King Brady. "Now that we have made the bargain, let us make the arrangements."

"Go ahead, boss."

"How far is it to White Ash Portage?"

"P'raps seventy-five miles."

"How long do you think it would take us to go there through the woods?"

"Oh, p'raps four days."

"Progress would be slow?"

"Yas, for most of ther way ye'd hev to foller blazed trees. Do ye see?"

"Exactly. Well, now, my plan is thus: You are to officiate as guide to a couple of New York sportsmen who are in the woods for game."

"We will be made up properly as hunters, and will carry arms accordingly. We must fall in with Gray and Johnson. Have they any companions?"

"Mebbe some of the gang are with 'em. But I'm not sure. They are keeping pretty dark."

"That's it, eh?"

"Yas. They're pretty sore over their experience in Greenbush. You see, they was dead sure of the game till you fellers spoiled it for 'em."

"Yes, they were pretty sure of it," agreed Old King Brady. "But they are pretty sure also of paying the score in court."

"Ye think so?"

"You can bet they will."

"I say, you two fellers are pooty keen detectives, aren't ye?"

"Perhaps so. That is simply a matter of opinion."

"Wall, my opinion is thet way. An' dang ye, I like yer style."

"I thank you for your frank expression."

"Here's my hand on it. When Hannibal Smith gives his word, he keeps it. I'll agree to stick by ye."

"Good for you, Hannibal. You'll not be sorry for it."

Thus the compact was made.

It did not take the Bradys long to complete their arrangements.

They made up as New York sportsmen and completely disguised themselves. Thus equipped they secretly left Greenbush.

Nobody knew of their purpose or where they had gone.

Into the Maine woods they plunged in company with their guide.

For days they tramped the wilds, seldom encountering human habitation, and camping at night in wild out-of-the-way places.

One day they came into a rude wood trail which led down to the shores of a lake.

Here, in some bushes, where it had been long hidden, the guide Smith found a canoe.

He launched it and they paddled out over the surface of the lake.

They entered a bayou which extended far up to the mouth of a river. Then Smith pointed out over the tree-tops and cried:

"Do ye see that?"

It was a thin column of smoke.

The detectives nodded.

"Wall," declared the woodsman, "that is the camp at White Ash Portage."

The detectives were thrilled.

Over beyond that space of tree-tops were the two birds whom they hoped to bring within the pale of justice.

They were drawing near the end of the trail.

Would they succeed or would they fail? They would soon know.

"How far is it over there?" asked Old King Brady.

"Mebbe four miles."

The detectives exchanged glances.

"Well?" asked Harry. "What is our best plan now?"

"We must work cautiously," replied the old detective. "They are no doubt on guard, and if we should excite their suspicions it would be a hopeless chase to again get on track of them."

"That's a fact, boss," agreed Smith. "What you say is a sartin fact. Thar's no keener man lives than Gus Gray."

"Well, what do you suggest?" asked Harry.

"I think our best plan is to go into camp here and pretend to hunt. We can then gradually get into the confidence of the villains."

"That's jest the idea," declared Smith. "If they think ye're only hunters come into the region fer game they won't be afraid."

The detectives both realized the futility of attempting to capture the villains by an open move.

They were well armed, and would make a desperate fight.

Again, so many of their confederates were in the woods that they would have plenty of assistance, and it would be almost impossible to get them safely to civilization.

It was easy for the detectives to see that their best and only plan was to use strategy and time.

"I'll tell ye," declared Smith, finally, "I have an idea which I think will work."

"Ah!" exclaimed Old King Brady. "What may it be?"

The woodsman drew his lank frame up and ejected a quid of tobacco. He looked across the lake inscrutably, and replied:

"It's jest this. We'll camp over here on this neck of land. Then we'll do some hunting and fishing."

"As soon as we get settled I'll happen over to see my pals. See?"

"Capital!" cried Old King Brady.

"Yas. Wall, I'll tell 'em I've got a couple of city chaps up here on a hunting trip, an' that they're dead-game sports."

"Exactly."

"I'll get 'em interested and at the same time lull 'em into security. Then I'll ask 'em over to play a game of poker. The rest will be easy."

"Splendid!" cried Old King Brady. "Nothing could be better. Your plan is all right, Smith."

The fellow smiled shrewdly.

"Durned if I don't think I'd like to be a detective, myself," he declared.

"You would be a good one, I am sure," said Old King Brady.

Hannibal Smith's plan was adopted, and the detectives proceeded to follow it out.

The camp was made as directed by Smith on the little neck of land.

It was ingeniously constructed by the woodsman of boughs and branches of trees. It was made cosey and comfortable.

Then the detectives became hunters and fishermen.

Their rifles cracked in the woods and they whipped the lake with their rods and flies.

Of course their presence in the region was quickly discovered by Gray and his pals.

It had been Smith's plan to pay a visit to Gray's camp, but this did not prove necessary.

Gray visited them, though with the seeming of accident. The detectives were returning to camp one day after a quest for partridge when a man stepped across their trail.

He stood with folded arms gazing keenly at them.

The detectives halted.

"Ah! Howdy, stranger," said Old King Brady. "You're well met."

"Yes," replied Gray, stiffly. "Up here for game, are you?"

"That's the story."

"Have any luck?"

"Well, pretty fair. We bagged sixteen fine partridge this morning."

Gray's manner relaxed.

"That's good sport," he said. "Where are you from?"

"New York City."

"Ever been here before?"

"No."

"New country, then?"

"Yes."

"How long will you stay?"

"Not much longer. We must get back to business. Where are you from?"

"Oh, I live up here the year round," replied Gray.

"During the winter?" asked the detective, affecting surprise.

"Certainly."

"What can you find to do here then?"

"Oh, that's my busy season. My partner and I get out logs. In the spring we float them down to market."

"Oh, that's it, then."

"Just so. My name is Augustus Gray. I haven't yours?"

"Austin Thompson, and my son here, Arthur, is as devoted a sportsman as myself. Where is your camp, Mr. Gray?"

"About four miles north."

"Well," said Old King Brady, frankly, holding out his hand, "I am glad to have met you."

"The same," said Gray. "Acquaintances are few in this region. Drop over to our camp and see us."

"I will. Have you a partner?"

"Yes."

"Are you poker players?"

Gray's eyes danced.

"You've hit it," he cried. "We shall get on all right. Who is your guide?"

"Hannibal Smith."

Gray gave a violent start.

In that moment all vestige of suspicion faded from his face. The detectives had won.

"Do you know him?" asked Harry.

"Well, rather," replied Gray. "Just mention my name

to him. Well, gents, call up at our camp at the first opportunity. I'll try and make it pleasant."

CHAPTER XII.

ARRANGING THE TRAP.

"Thank you," replied Old King Brady. "We'll try and do the same by you."

"Good-day."

Gray vanished in the forest. The detectives plodded on in silence for some distance. Then Harry said:

"We have the whip line on him all right, partner."

"You're right, we have," agreed Old King Brady. "He is our bird."

Very much elated, the two detectives returned to their camp.

They reported the affair to Smith.

"Good!" cried the woodsman. "Nothing could be better. That was well done."

"It looks as if we were sure of our game."

"Wall, you bet."

"Now what had we better do? Go up there first?"

"Sure. We'll go up and get the lay of the land. See?"

"Yes."

"That will get their confidence."

"Sure."

"Then we'll ask them down here. We can slip the handcuffs onto 'em and have 'em forty miles on ther way home afore their pals git onto the job."

"Smith," cried Old King Brady, "you are certainly cut out for a detective. Just stick to the game."

The woodsman was extremely elated.

He was beginning to thoroughly enjoy the game. He felt exceedingly proud of his prowess.

The Bradys had no fear of his treachery. He was as bitter a foe of Gray's now as he had been an ally.

That night Smith paid a visit to Gray's camp.

When he came home in the early morning hours he brought a surprising report. His face was long.

"What do ye think," he declared. "Ther's a reglar nest of 'em up there."

"Crooks?" asked Old King Brady.

"Cut-throats and murderers. They're planning all sorts of deviltry for the winter. They've already laid the wires for the trapping of a rich man in Bangor. They mean to abduct people of wealth an' keep 'em up here in the woods until they are willing to pay a big ransom. They will be brought here and taken away blindfolded."

"Whew!" exclaimed Old King Brady. "That is a deep game."

"Wall, you bet."

"How many are in the gang?"

"How many do you s'pose?"

"Perhaps ten."

The woodsman whistled.

"Ten? Why, there's a settlement of 'em up there. There's not less than fifty, the best way ye can make it."

The Bradys were astounded.

But they were not dismayed.

They looked at each other.

"I don't know about going up there to play poker," said Old King Brady. "What's to hinder their murdering us in cold blood for the money we have on our persons?"

Smith's face was clouded.

"It's a durned hard game," he declared. "I don't know how to fix it."

"I see no other way than to bring a big posse into the woods," said Old King Brady.

But Smith shook his head.

"They'd whip anything short of a regiment," he declared.

"Do you believe it?"

"I know it."

"Well, we must break up this nest of outlaws some way."

"I dunno," said Smith, moodily. "They axed me all about you, an' whether you'd be likely to command a ransom. I didn't give 'em any idea that ye would. But I could see that the feeling was that way."

The detectives were thoughtful.

To fall into the hands of the gang of cutthroats just now would certainly be a great calamity.

Their disguise would be easily discovered.

Once their identity was known the fate which would befall them would be fearful to contemplate. The cruelty of Gray's nature was well known.

But they were determined not to give up the game.

"Make or break," said Old King Brady grimly. "If we can only coax Gray and Johnson over here some night I think we can settle matters pretty quick."

But Smith did not seem to be as sanguine.

Indeed, he shivered and betrayed fear. The Bradys did not allow this to escape them.

"It looks to me as if our man was taking back water," said Old King Brady.

"Indeed, I think so too," said Harry. "Did you notice that he trembled when he spoke about the gang?"

"Yes."

"It will be well to keep an eye on him."

"I believe you."

"He might throw us over yet and go back to his comrades."

The detectives weighed all these things carefully. Finally Old King Brady called Smith up and asked:

"Are you loyal to us?"

The woodsman was astonished.

"What do ye mean?" he asked. "Do ye think I'd go back on ye?"

"Well, there is nothing sure in this life."

"Well, you needn't worry," said Smith. "I'll never hitch horses with Gray agin. If he found out you were detectives he'd never believe that I didn't bring ye up here on purpose."

"Well, that is logical."

"Yas, an' straight goods. It's the fear of gettin' into his clutches afterwards that bothers me."

"But you have the protection of the law," said Old King Brady.

"What does that amount ter when chaps like Gray an' his gang git after ye? They're worse than the Mafia."

"Well," said the old detective, earnestly, "you may make up your mind that we will do our utmost to see that you are protected."

"Thank ye," said Smith, earnestly. "An' I give ye my oath that I'll never go back on ye."

"We can't ask more than that."

"An' I can't give more."

"It is enough."

The detectives now banished all fears of this sort.

They decided to go ahead with their first scheme for the trapping of the two crooks. So Smith was sent over to Gray's with an invitation to spend the night at the camp of the sportsmen from New York.

When Smith returned his face was brighter.

"They are comin'," he said. "I reckon the bait caught on all right."

The canoe was placed in readiness for an embarkation. They were to push down the lake with the prisoners as rapidly as possible.

It was reckoned that the foot of the lake could be reached before morning.

Then they would strike a trail for a settlement which Smith knew of forty miles below, and where law and order prevailed.

This distance ought to be covered in two days.

With the start they would have it should be very difficult for the gang of cut-throats to overtake them.

As all these plans were discussed the detectives felt more and more confident. Even Smith's spirits rose.

The two villains had agreed to be at the camp by nine o'clock.

It was a little after that hour when Smith's keen ear detected the distant plashing of a paddle.

"They are coming," he said.

"Well, let them come," said Old King Brady eagerly. "All is ready."

A ruddy camp-fire glowed under the trees and the detectives had made all preparations for an evening's merry-making.

A rude table had been improvised and the cards were placed upon it. Also a couple of bottles of choice brandy.

When the keel of their canoe grated on the sand and Gray and Johnson leaped out this spectacle appealed to their appetites and warmed the impulses of their hearts.

"Ah, gentlemen," cried Gray as he came into the circle of firelight. "This looks cheerful indeed. I am glad to meet you."

"The pleasure is mutual," said Old King Brady, warmly. "Pray make yourselves at home."

The two guests walked into the fire-lit circle and sat down at the table.

The brandy was discussed, and then a period of conversation ensued.

Next the cards were dealt and the play began. For an hour it was indulged in and the fortunes varied.

Gray was in the highest of spirits.

"I say, I am stuck on you fellows," he cried. "I want you all to come over to my camp Thursday night."

"Thank you for the invitation," said Old King Brady.

"I think we can be just as hospitable as you," declared Gray.

"We do not doubt it."

"By the way, what is your business in New York?"

"We are not in business at present," said Old King Brady.

"Retired, eh?"

"Well, perhaps so."

"It must be a comfortable feeling that you have money enough and need worry no more?"

"It is rather."

The detectives did not fail to note the significance of the villain's questions.

But it posted them as well. They would never risk a visit to Gray's camp, as can well be imagined.

It was now a question of the execution of their plans of capture.

They felt that the coast was clear. There was no evidence that the villains had brought any of their gang over with them.

Therefore it was certain that they considered the detectives easy prey and sure to be corralled on Thursday night.

Far different would have been their view of the case had they known that a plot was extant to corral them this very night.

Old King Brady suddenly arose.

"Gentlemen," he said quietly, "we have enjoyed your company very much this evening."

"The pleasure is ours," said Gray.

"I agree to that," said Johnson.

"I am afraid you will not think it such a pleasure before you are through," said Old King Brady.

Gray looked up quickly.

"Why not, my friend?"

"I will explain. There are reasons why you cannot be permitted to return to your camp before making a journey with us."

Gray looked mystified.

"What are you driving at?" he asked.

"Hands up!" said Old King Brady in a voice of steel. "You are prisoners. The game is up."

For a moment they were stupefied. It was hard for them to realize the truth.

"Trapped!" finally Gray gurgled.

"Fiends and fury!" gritted Johnson. "Curse you, Smith, for a traitor."

"No, it's a joke," said Gray, incredulously. "It must be."

"A very grim joke," said Old King Brady. "Smith, do your work."

"I'm sorry, pard," said the woodsman, nonchalantly, "but you see I've struck a new line."

"You shall die for this!" gritted Gray.

"Oh, I guess not."

"Do you think you can take us safely out of this wilderness?"

"We can try."

"Well, you'll never do it. We have two score of the best woodsmen in Maine. They'll run you down quick enough."

"P'raps they will," chuckled Smith. "But they're up against as slick an article as themselves."

With this Smith jubilantly slipped handcuffs upon the two villains.

"There is no time to lose," said Old King Brady hurriedly. "Get them into the boat as quickly as possible."

Meanwhile Johnson and Gray were indulging in hot recriminations.

"I told ye not to be too sure," snarled Johnson. "If ye'd brought along some of the boys this wouldn't have happened."

"You couldn't see through the game any better than I could," retorted Gray.

"There warn't no use in coming down here to-night, anyway."

"Oh, you're a good prophet, now it's all over."

"An' you're a fool."

"You'll pay for that, Johnson."

"When we both stand on the scaffold," sneered Johnson. "We'll never stand outside of a jail again."

"You're a fool."

"P'raps I am, but I'm no worse than you," retorted Johnson.

Meantime the detectives were busy getting the canoe ready.

Smith kept guard over the prisoners. Gray tried to cajole him.

"I say, Hannibal," he declared, "if you'll stand in with us I'll see that you make a cool ten thousand out of it."

Smith only grinned.

"I've given up a crooked life," he declared. "I'm goin' to become a detective an' settle down."

"You're a cursed fool."

"Mebbe I am."

"Just twist these handcuffs off and give us a chance."

"Don't see it."

"You'll not be sorry."

But Hannibal was not to be deceived. His conceit was vastly tickled by the prospect of becoming a famous detective.

By this time the detectives had the canoe ready.

The prisoners were led down to the shore.

They were handcuffed together.

CHAPTER XIII.

OUT OF THE WOODS.

A brace of revolvers in the old detectives' hands covered Gray.

The same in Harry's grip covered Johnson full and fair.

Both villains half started up. But as they looked into the revolver muzzles they were willing to settle back.

"Don't tie our feet," protested Gray. "If the boat should tip over we'd drown to a certainty."

"What's the diff?" demanded Johnson, scornfully. "We'll hang anyway."

"Not if the boys can overtake us," cried Gray.

"Your feet shall not be bound if you will agree to one thing," said Old King Brady.

"Well, what's that?"

"You will make no trouble in the canoe. Neither try to tip it over or escape."

"All right," agreed the villain. "It is a go."

"You agree?"

"Yes."

"All right. Get into the canoe."

"I'll make a promise to go along without trouble if you'll do another thing."

"What?"

"Take off the handcuffs."

But Old King Brady shook his head.

"Hardly," he said. "I'll not trust you as far as that. I may be foolish, but not so foolish as that."

The two prisoners were seated in the canoe, which was a large one.

Then Smith took a paddle forward, Old King Brady the next amidship, and Harry sat behind the prisoners. The canoe shot out into the lake.

The camp fire was left burning for a possible blind to the outlaws at Gray's camp.

The detectives felt sure of a good start.

It was hardly likely that the villains would think of pursuit until the next day.

By that time a long lead, which it would be difficult to overcome, would have been obtained.

Over the smooth surface of the lake the canoe glided.

Hours passed.

The canoe was held along the shore to the southward. Day was breaking in the east when the canoe landed.

They were at the extreme lower end of the lake.

The party disembarked.

Then a camp fire was made on the shore and coffee and biscuits were prepared with some dried meat.

The two prisoners had looked and listened hopefully all the way for some sign of pursuit.

But this did not appear.

So they were exceedingly downcast and moody when preparations were made for the long tramp through the forest.

Smith went ahead as the guide.

Next came Gray, with Old King Brady behind him with loaded revolver ready for an emergency.

Young King Brady walked behind Johnson in the same manner.

At times Gray indulged in much profanity and villification.

He called the detectives all sorts of hard names, and indulged in personal abuse of the worst kind.

Then suddenly he would change.

From defiance and hatred he would drop to the most humble and abject of protestations and pleadings.

But of course all this was in vain.

Johnson, however, was at all times stolid and indifferent. In this he showed more of manhood to a certainty.

"Look here, Brady," cried the desperate villain, finally, "what's the use. You're not without a price."

"Oh, stop that sort of thing," said the old detective, impatiently. "It's of no use, Gray. You might as well make up your mind to take your medicine like a man."

"Curse you, for a stubborn fool."

And then Gray would look back and rave at the stupidity of his men for not coming to his rescue.

"They should know that I need them," he cried angrily. "But they are never on hand when needed. They're a worthless crew."

Thus the hours passed.

All day long the party tramped on. When nightfall came they came out upon the banks of a branch of the Penobscot.

"Now," said Smith, the guide, "we may do two things. We may follow this stream and eventually reach Greenbush. It will take two days longer.

"Or we may bear to the southwest and strike a settlement about to-morrow night. From there we may get conveyance to Greenbush."

The matter was considered.

"Well," said Old King Brady, finally, "I think we will do just as well to strike for the settlement."

"All right."

"You say we can get conveyance from there. If so, it will be agreeable, for we will all have walked far enough by that time."

"Indeed, I agree with you, Mr. Brady," said Smith. "It's ther settlement we will make."

Accordingly the little party pushed on for White Rock, which was the name of the settlement.

When it finally became very dark, a halt was called.

Camp was made in the woods.

The prisoners were securely bound, and it was arranged that each man in the party should take turns watching them during the night.

Smith and Old King Brady rolled themselves up in blankets and went to sleep almost instantly.

Harry sat beside the prisoners and watched them.

But they needed very little guard.

Both were completely fagged out and they were soon sound asleep. It was hard for Harry to keep awake.

But he realized the necessity and fought off the feeling of slumber which was so all-powerful.

When midnight came, as per arrangement, Harry awakened Smith, who watched until four o'clock. Then Old King Brady took up the vigil.

In this manner all got sleep and were much refreshed, when, at seven o'clock, all were astir.

By nine o'clock they were once more on the tramp.

White Rock was only nineteen miles distant, and Smith declared:

"We'll get there sometime in the afternoon. The trail is open and easy."

"I am glad of that," declared Old King Brady.

The two prisoners were now getting very anxious.

They listened continually for the sounds of pursuit in

their rear. They would have lagged, too, very gladly, had not Old King Brady kept them up.

Mile after mile was covered.

Finally they came out upon the banks of a small creek.

Then Smith declared:

"It is only two miles to White Rock. We'll be there within the hour."

A groan came from Gray.

He sank down upon the ground.

"I'm sick," he declared dejectedly. "I can't go any further."

"That is too thin," said Old King Brady sternly. "Get on your feet."

"Kill me if you will, but I tell you I'll go no further."

"Very well, then," said the old detective, "we will carry you. Give me that rope, Harry."

The detective knotted the rope about the villain's ankles. Then he said to Harry and Smith:

"Come, give me a hand here. This fellow has got to be taken to White Rock; if not by easy means, by the best we can find."

And the obdurate villain was dragged along the ground for several hundred yards.

So far as strength was concerned, they could have dragged him miles.

The result, however, was most disastrous for the scoundrel. He soon began to howl for mercy.

Old King Brady allowed him to get upon his feet, and this ended all trouble.

CHAPTER XIV.

AT WHITE ROCK.

White Rock was a small lumbering town of a thousand inhabitants.

But as Smith had declared it was of a better class than most settlements, and law and order prevailed.

It was not at all difficult to find constables who assisted the detectives and found lodgings for the prisoners in a small log structure used as a jail.

Here they were securely lodged.

"Is there a posse of armed men in the town?" Old King Brady asked of one of the constables.

"Why, yes," replied the officer.

"You had better call them out."

The constable was astonished.

"Why?" he asked.

"You will understand later, perhaps. If those two-score of armed outlaws descend upon White Rock and find it undefended they may take a notion to wipe it off the map."

"Do you think they would dare attack White Rock?"

"They will dare anything to rescue their leaders."

"Well," said the constable in an incredulous way, "all that may be true. I will see about it."

"I admonish you to guard against an attack," said Old King Brady.

That the constable was skeptical was certain. But he finally called out a posse of citizens and held them in readiness.

This had barely been done when darkness came.

There was no sleep for the Bradys that night. They set a watch upon the log jail.

But so far as the personal efforts of the prisoners was concerned there was little need of this.

They were helpless.

It proved, however, an exceedingly wise precaution.

Toward morning, dark figures came tramping into the streets of the town. The detectives recognized them instantly.

Rough, murderous and vengeful, the outlaws of Camp Gray, armed to the teeth, marched down into White Rock.

To them it was but a handful of defenceless people, whom they, with their organization and weapons, could overawe.

They had followed the trail all the way from the lake with great fidelity, though it was no difficult matter.

The leader of the gang deployed his men through the streets and then the alarm was given.

The Bradys and Smith at once established themselves at the jail.

The constables rallied their men and very speedily White Rock became the seat of a lively war.

The outlaws, yelling savagely, bore down upon the jail for the purpose of rescuing their comrades.

The Bradys and the posse of citizens made an objection.

Bullets began to fly thick and fast. It was a hot time.

But suddenly the outlaws, finding the defence as strong as themselves, retired. They advanced for a parley.

It was Cool McPherson, one of the greatest dare-devils in the Maine woods, who came forward for the outlaws.

Harry Brady represented the jail defenders.

"Do ye mean fight?" asked McPherson.

"Of course we do," replied Harry.

"But kain't ye see we're too strong for ye?"

"It is the other way."

"Wall, I guess not. But kain't yer see we're in the right."

"How do you make that out?"

"Why, we jest want to rescue our comrades. You've no right to keep 'em prisoners."

"That is a question," said Harry, quietly. "I am sure they are fit subjects for justice."

"Are ye detectives?"

"Yes."

"Wall, what in thunder do ye want of Gus Gray?"

"He is a murderer and a thief. There are many charges against him."

This silenced the offense for a time. But presently the parley was resumed.

"We'll make good terms if you'll only release our two men."

"I can't do it," replied Harry. "I am sure it pains me to disoblige you, but there is no other way."

The truee bearer bowed profoundly.

"I kin see that we're got to fight yer," he said in a dis-

appointed tone. "Well, we'll wipe your town off the map. You can't hold against us."

He went back to his own side.

But to the surprise of the detectives the expected attack did not come.

The defenders of the jail kept themselves in readiness.

The silence of the attacking party to them boded something ominous. The Bradys felt sure that some treachery was at work.

The detectives were sure of this when some of the constables came in and declared that the outlaws had drawn off into the woods.

"They've given it up," declared one of the constables. "They reckon the odds against them too great."

"That does not deceive me," said Old King Brady.

"What; do you believe it a trick?"

"Yes."

All that day the posse remained about the jail.

But no attack was made.

What seemed like reliable word came that the outlaws had abandoned the attack and gone back to the woods.

From White Rock to Greenbush it was possible, when the river was high, to proceed by means of a small steamer.

During a dry season the river would be dry, and the boat could not therefore be run.

But as chance had it, at this time the river was high and the steamer was in commission.

Old King Brady had no doubt but that the action of the outlaws was merely a trick.

Some treacherous game lurked behind it.

But what this was he could not hope to guess.

He decided to risk the trip down the river on the steamer.

It would be, he believed, comparatively safe, for the boat should be able to outrun those on shore.

Moreover, the authorities of White Rock were getting uneasy.

"This 'ere thing is blocking bizness in this 'ere town," said one citizen. "Of course we want to do what's right, but it seems to me this is a case in which our rights to interfere are limited."

"At least, courtesy to officers from another State should impel you to give us assistance," said Old King Brady, "inasmuch as the fact remains that these outlaws are peculiar to your own State and a menace to your personal safety."

This skillful argument, however, did not seem to satisfy the denizens of White Rock.

They did not like the idea of the town maintaining a state of siege.

There was no complaint of any of their citizens against either Gray or Johnson, and there was a question as to whether the extradition laws were not being violated.

Public opinion is a very capricious element.

Old King Brady realized this fully, and he saw that their stay in White Rock could not be long.

It was necessary to make an instant change of base.

Therefore he could not but believe it wholly in his favor that the outlaws had temporarily withdrawn.

No doubt they had been impelled to this very act by the foreseeing of such possible action upon the part of the town authorities.

Old King Brady lost no time.

He at once proceeded to the steamer landing. The captain of the craft was a lanky specimen of the down-east Yankee.

"Sartinly I'll charter my boat," he declared. "Yew kin bet I'm lookin' fer jest sich jobs as this."

"We will bring our men right down," said Old King Brady.

"All right, but—"

"What?"

"I allus like tew make terms aforhand. It's bizness."

"Oh, yes, certainly. What is your price?"

"What air ye willing to give?"

Old King Brady looked at the craft and its owner.

He saw that its furnace would hardly consume two cords of wood on the run. There were three in the crew.

The detective made a mental calculation.

The real expense of the run to the owner of the steamer would hardly exceed twenty dollars.

But the old detective knew the policy of liberal pay.

So he said:

"I'll give you one hundred dollars to land us safe in Greenbush."

The steamer's captain stared.

One hundred dollars was much more than he would take in at any one trip.

He was quick to make the trade.

"It's a bargain!" he said. "Put up yer cash."

Old King Brady pulled out a hundred dollar bill.

In those parts banknotes of this denomination were exceedingly few. The steamer captain stared at it.

He spat into the water, and hemmed and hawed and held the bill gingerly in his fingers.

"How in time dew yew think I could git that changed in these parts?" he asked.

"Don't change it," said Old King Brady with a sudden sense of humor.

"Don't change it?"

"No."

"What in thunder will I do with it then?"

"Keep it."

"Gosh all blazes! D'ye think I'm a Vanderbilt? I hev use fer all my money."

"Haven't you any bank about here?"

"Not nigher than Bangor."

"Well, let me have it then," said Old King Brady. "Probably you're afraid it's a counterfeit."

The captain protested that this was not so.

But Old King Brady drew out the equivalent in smaller bills and this made matters all right.

The captain was highly pleased.

The old detective now returned in all haste to the jail.

As he approached he saw that there was some sort of discussion being held by them.

He did not, however, dream its true import just then.

But as he came up one of the party who was the head man of the village said sharply:

"Look hyar. Whar did yew git your authority to lodge these men in jail anyway?"

CHAPTER XV.

AFTER SOME EXCITING INCIDENTS THE CASE IS ENDED.

For a moment Old King Brady felt the blood leap in his veins.

The man's manner was extremely offensive, and his words irritating.

He saw at a glance that he was a specimen of the strong-headed, know-it-all, but densely ignorant backwoodsman.

The old detective, however, controlled his temper.

"We are going to remove the prisoners where they will give you no further trouble," he said. "They will be taken to Bangor for trial."

At the same moment he walked toward the jail door. But the countryman planted himself again in his path. "That ain't no answer to my question," he said obstinately. "Indeed?" said Old King Brady, quietly, "I am in too much of a hurry to answer questions just now."

The fellow's face flamed.

"You are, eh? Well, I demand that it be answered."

"By what authority?" asked Old King Brady in a steely voice.

"My own authority."

"Who are you?"

"I am town moderator, elected by ther choice of ther people, an' my word is law. You kain't come into White Rock an' run things with a high hand. We know a thing or two as well as you."

"Do you think your authority will admit of your interfering with me in the execution of my duty?" asked Old King Brady.

"I reckon my authority is bigger nor yours in this 'cre town."

"Look here, my man, I've no time to waste with you. I am an officer of the law——"

"You ain't no Maine officer."

"I am a New York detective."

"Huh, that's what I thought. Wall, you can't take no prisoners out of this State without extradition papers. Now, yew are holdin' these men without ther right to do so. Constable, unlock that jail door an' set them prisoners free."

The constable turned to the door of the log jail.

But before he could open it Old King Brady stepped before him, placed his back to the door, and held up a brace of revolvers.

His eyes were like gleaming diamonds and his voice rasped as he said:

"The man who steps a foot forward to obey that order is a dead man."

"D'ye hear that?" yelled the town moderator. "He sets our laws at defiance. Kill him! Shoot him!"

"Hold!" thundered Old King Brady. "Death is the portion of the man who dares to draw a weapon on me."

Even the moderator did not like the looks of those gleaming pistol barrels or the eyes behind them.

"Now, you ignorant bully," said the old detective angrily, "you shall listen to what I say."

"I am a New York detective. I am in the Secret Service, and I need no extradition papers in this case."

"These prisoners are State of Maine criminals, and their crime was committed in the State of Maine."

"I do not intend to take them out of this State. I was called from New York to take charge of this case by the authorities of the town of Greenbush, and thither I shall take the prisoners."

"I am armed with the law, and my authority is superior to yours. The man who interferes with me will be shot dead in his tracks."

"Moreover, the law demands that a private citizen shall render assistance to an officer in the execution of his duty, if he so requests. This is all I have to say."

Silence fell upon the group.

Old King Brady drew back his coat lapel and showed his star.

"Here is my authority," he said. "Now interfere with me if you dare."

Even the town moderator was silenced.

Harry now opened the jail door and entering handcuffed the two prisoners to his wrists.

Then the two detectives led their game down to the steamer.

Not until they were aboard, however, did Old King Brady feel easy.

He knew the lawless character of these settlements, and also that some new construction might suggest itself to the ignorant authorities.

The crowd stood sullenly on the river bank while the steamer put off and started down the current.

"Whew!" said Smith, impulsively. "I didn't think you could give sech a speech as that, partner. I might make a detective, but I kain't never come up to you."

Old King Brady laughed.

"Well, things did look squally there for a while," he said.

"I should say so. I was sure there'd be blood shed afore we got through."

"That was a very pig-headed fellow."

"That he was. But I'll tell ye," said Smith, impressively, "if they had opened fire on 'ye thar's a number of 'em would be dropped in ther tracks."

He displayed a revolver.

His eyes gleamed.

Old King Brady appreciated the sentiment displayed. He had no doubt of the sincerity of the speaker.

The prisoners were placed in the steamer's cabin.

Harry unhandcuffed himself from them and went out on deck. Through the windows it was easy to keep an eye on them.

So it would have been difficult for them to have attempted escape.

But just as the steamer cleared the bend and headed down the current an unlooked for thing happened.

Suddenly the pilot gave a loud cry.

The glass in the pilot house was shivered and his cap went flying from his head.

A puff of smoke on the river bank told the story.

The steamer had been fired upon.

It was a close call for the pilot.

The bullet had carried away his cap, but very fortunately had done him no injury.

The captain's Yankee ire was aroused.

He rushed into the cabin and came out with a long-barreled old-fashioned rifle.

"I'll see if we kain't navigate this 'ere river without bein' in danger of our lives," he shouted.

With this he fired.

He had aimed at a clump of bushes on the river bank.

Whether the bullet took effect or not was not known, but a chorus of yells came from the shore, and then the bullets began to fly.

The pilot protected himself by sitting down low in his house. All steam was put on.

A running fight ensued.

The outlaws were protected by the dense growth of the river bank, and the lay of the land seemed to favor them.

The detectives kept up a return fire and things were lively for a time.

It tickled the Yankee captain.

"Makes me think of ther time I fit against ther Mexieans at Monterey," he cried. "Gol durn 'em. We'll give 'em as good as they send."

But the contest could not last forever.

The steamer was outstripping the attacking party, and soon they were beyond range.

But at this juncture a new development arose.

In the excitement of the fight the prisoners in the cabin were quite forgotten.

Now, however, a sound of breaking glass caused all to turn. They beheld a startling sight.

Gray had in some manner contrived to leap through one of the cabin windows.

He struck the deck almost at Old King Brady's feet.

He fell sprawling, for his handcuffed hands impeded his balance. But he made a desperate leap, gained his feet and made a mad rush for the rail.

Old King Brady made a dash forward and grasped him just as he reached the steamer's rail.

In another moment he would have been overboard. His face was heated and choleric.

The light of insanity gleamed in his eyes.

"Let me go," he raved. "I want the water. It is my home."

The maniacal power with which he sought to carry out his suicidal purpose was terrific.

He might have overpowered Old King Brady and yet gained his end had it not been for Smith.

The big backwoodsman contributed his strength and the

villain was mastered. It became necessary to tie him hand and foot.

He was carried, raving, into the cabin.

The strain had been too much.

He was a hopeless maniac.

In due time the steamer reached Greenbush. The two prisoners were taken ashore.

A sensation was created in the town when the news of the detectives' return spread.

The residents of the town turned out en masse. The prisoners were jailed, and then the detectives came in for a surfeit of praise.

That they deserved it the reader will no doubt agree.

At the hotel the loungers gathered and discussed the case for many months thereafter. The fame of the Bradys was forever established in Maine.

The two crooks were held for trial.

Gus Gray was remanded to an insane asylum. His villainous career was ended there.

Cyrus Blodget, alias Joe Johnson, was sentenced to prison for life. He is yet working out his sentence.

Rafael Black and Janiee returned to their home in Portland. There Janiee was restored to her lover, Clifton Moore, and they are soon to be married.

Artemas Black is still a selectman of Greenbush, and Jefferson Clark yet keeps the hotel.

But it will be many years ere they will have another case in that little down-east town which will prove so exciting and interesting as the one so skillfully solved by the Bradys.

Old and Young King Brady returned to New York, where the Chief of the Secret Service welcomed them warmly and they were soon at work upon another case of which we may hear in a later story.

[THE END.]

Read the next number (58) of "Secret Service," entitled, "WORKING FOR THE TREASURY; OR, THE BRADYS AND THE BANK BURGLARS," by a New York Detective.

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